

人類は衰退しました

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田中 ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑



GAGAGA

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CONTENTS

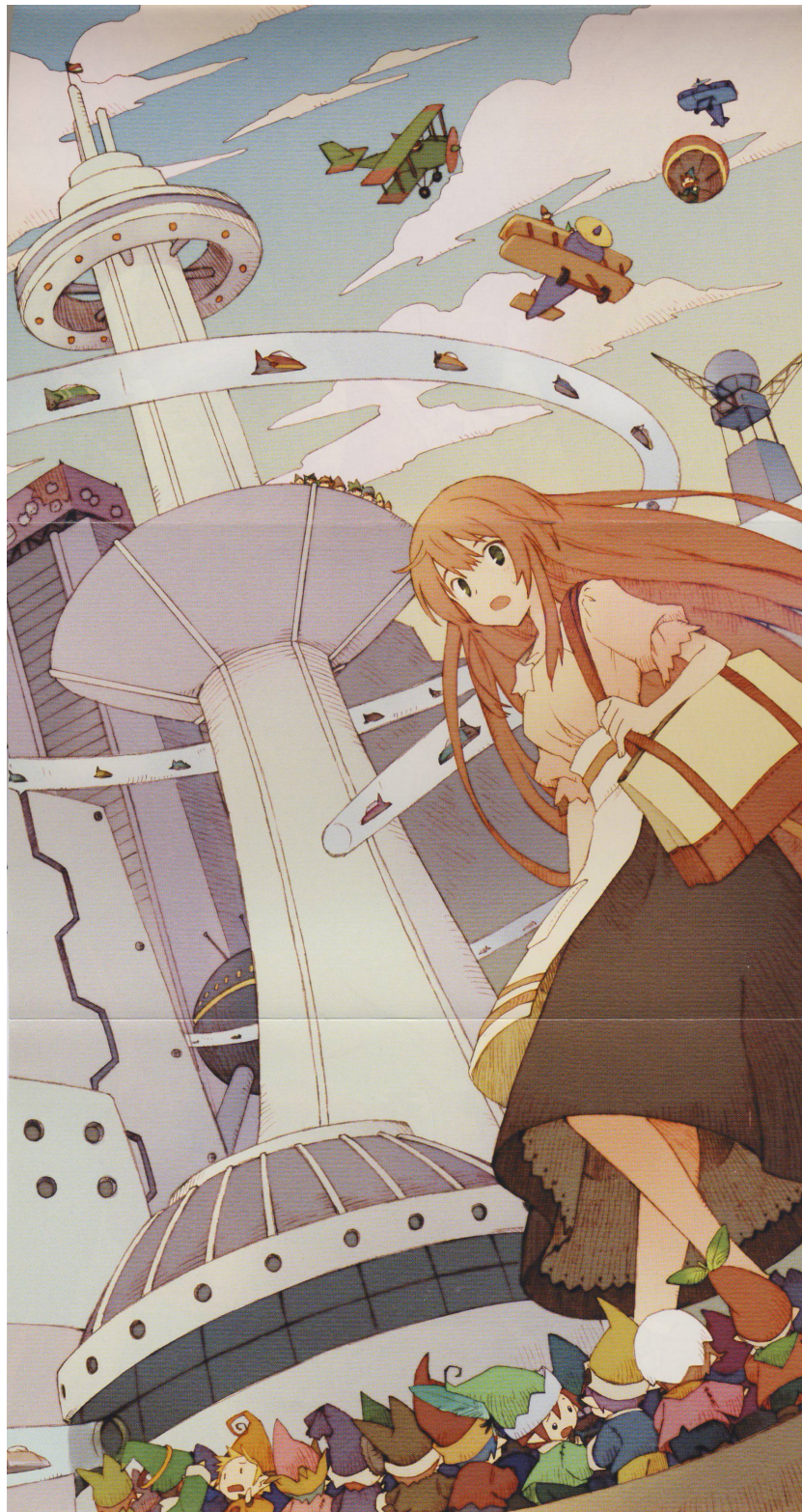
The Fairies and Their Earth...8

The Fairies and Their Dawn...61

Periodic Report - April...116

Afterword...119







人類は衰退しました

1



MAIN CHARACTERS 主 要 キ ャ ラ ク タ ー

Protagonist (Watashi, "I") Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. **Fairies** at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.

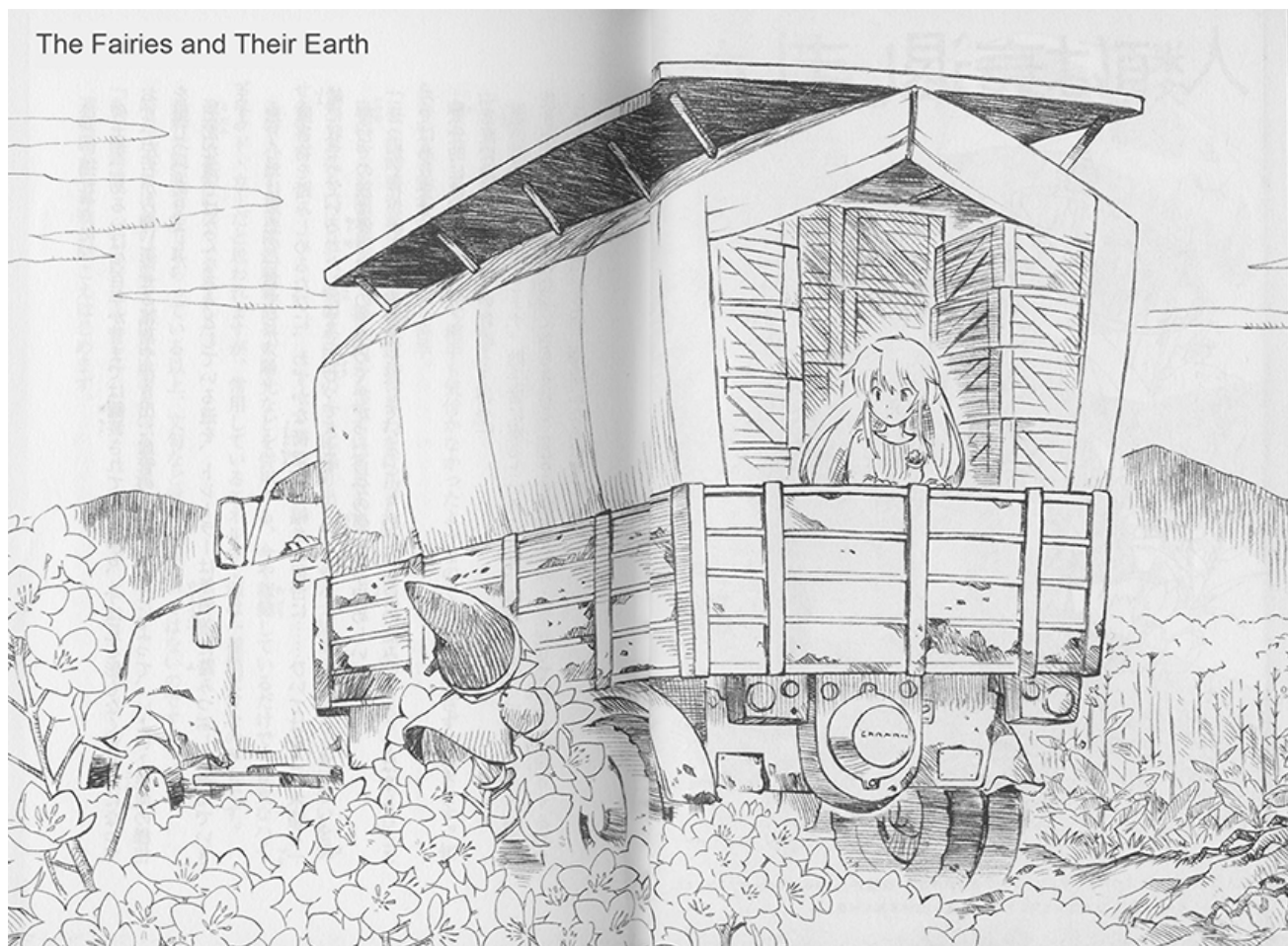
From the back cover:

Humanity Has Declined 1

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Fairies averaged a height of 10 centimeters with body to head ratio of three, had high intelligence and loved sweets. I had become a Mediator, an important job that acted as intermediary between said fairies and people, and had returned to my hometown, Kusunoki Village, the Village of the Camphor Tree. Being a job that could be done even by someone as old as my Grandfather, I thought that I had chosen quite the easy line of work, but when I headed to give my greeting to the fairies, however...

Tanaka Romeo challenges new frontiers in this debut work.

The Fairies and Their Earth



The shaking was dreadful.

Even a road paved many dozens, perhaps many hundreds of years past, had now become an overgrown path a mere shadow of its former self, and, due to the weeds and the roots jutting out like blood vessels pushing in from the sides, it was on the way to taking on an aspect of pure chaos.

The truck was nonchalantly treading this road on the way of becoming a non-road as it advanced.

The ride was in two words highly unpleasant.

With each obstacle trampled, the slightest impact was amplified and reached even the cargo bed section... where wooden crates were, together with I.

I was bitter at the me who decided that it was going to be more dignified to make the trip in the cargo bed.

Despite how I was traveling down a city road where flowers grew everywhere, the pain in my posterior was making it impossible for me to enjoy them.

Moodwise I felt close to the Dona Dona.

"I should have just sat on the passenger seat... no."

I whispered that idea, but promptly rejected it. To sit in the passenger seat signified to engage in conversation with the caravan's leader whether I wished to do so or not. For me, with my fear of strangers causing me to grow panicked when talking to new people, those would become hours that wore down on my nerves.

Between mind and posterior, what I would be happier wearing down was the latter, of course. Be that as it may, there certainly comes a point when even that became unbearable, so I faced the driver's seat and spoke.

With a breath in between,

"...may I ask how lang, long we have to go yet?"

Though I tripped on my words, my interlocutor didn't seem to notice, as he didn't really say anything on that matter. Talking to people I did not know was of course difficult for me.

"Three, four hours, maybe. 's long as the sun doesn't go hide himself, mind."

The leader, built like a massive boulder, answered me without even turning back.

Uttering a brief thank you, my thoughts ran to the solar battery module crudely stretched like an umbrella above the canopy.

This truck may appear to be one of those precious hybrid vehicle that it was rare to see even operate nowadays, one that used fuel cells, sunlight, and more all together, but it appeared that the source of energy it typically used was of a single type, instead.

I suddenly felt uneasy.

I had been allowed to ride without paying any fees, and therefore had no standing to make any complaints.

The massive thing advanced sluggishly with a speed of eight kilometers per hour.

"Four more hours..."

I began hearing a hummed song from the driver's seat.

It appeared that driving bathed by the wonderful shine of the sun felt quite good.

As for me, I became unable to stand the pain in my posterior at last and lifted my hips, however,

"You shouldn't stand up. I've had a guy fall down by doing that. Also and by the way, that guy got tangled in them tires there and had a nice slow death."

I immediately returned to sitting the way I was.

To at least try to distract myself, I gazed at the flowers growing free at the side of the road.

The yellow dominating the majority of what appeared in my sights was that of wild flowers. They were quite the useful plants, usable as ingredients for oil and for pickled foods. But, on a closer look, they were lousy with parasites, and I did not feel like diving among them like I used to in the past. That fact wore down my maiden's heart. And in a manner similar to how I was quite fed up with traveling in the cargo bed.

Trying to shelve away the aching pain in my rear I stared hard at the scene, and spotted a head jutting out from the flower field.

"....."

Our eyes met.

For about a second, I believe?

The head withdrew as if running away.

"...well well."

I hadn't seen *them* ever since I was a child.

It was altogether too sudden, the event of one second, but there was no possibility that I could be mistaking *him*.

Theirs were figures that could never be forgotten once seen.

I smiled, forgetting even the pain bothering my posterior.

"So they live even out here."

While they had been spotted in every area capable of supporting life, they didn't really show themselves to people. That sudden encounter I had seen as an omen of good fortune.

I had to find a way to deal with them in friendship.

It was something like a burden laid on me as one of the last graduates of The School.

I leaned forwards onto the tailgate of the cargo bed, and as my cheeks received a hint of wind, I ruminated on the subject, thinking back.

The graduation ceremony had occurred three days before.

The stage was an aged old auditorium.

Holding a ceremony in a place that dangerous, are you mad!, but it was just what it looked like, be at ease.

The reason why it looked dangerous was that its age was far too advanced, its ceiling looked ready to collapse, and there was nearly nothing left of the crumbling stone walls.

On entering the location of the ceremony we happened on the scene of twenty chairs gathered together in the middle of nothing, standing on top of pebbles so polished even the tiniest one had not been overlooked, which made us stand stock still for a few moments.

The pleasant scent that the fresh flowers were emitting, which pierced our chests, made the very back of our noses come to be numbed by its sharpness. Until the day when these fresh flowers have wilted: they made us conscious that these were the last hours given to us as students.

Once I graduated, all that was left to me was to return to my hometown.

That was a fact that I wanted to accept very lightly, dispassionately. But as it happened, as soon as I entered the auditorium my sights suddenly became covered in mist.

It was a premonition that pierced my skin. It announced that things would not end just like that.

At the ceremony we saw other people in attendance besides the teachers.

However, we could see nearly no parent of those graduating among them. As we were frequenting The School, we had left our distant hometowns behind to live in a dormitory. The majority of the people attending were teaching personnel affiliated with The School. Between the teachers and the people attending, they were in numbers greater than the

graduating students.

The ceremony begun with us pincered by pressure coming from forwards and back.

Before the ceremony, we all came out with a declaration that said we wouldn't cry.

To cry in front of a crowd of visitors appeared as quite the embarrassing act for children who were at long last becoming adults, which was to say us.

As there were none beyond the dozen graduating, the ceremony looked like it would end quickly.

But as it happened, the teaching staff made a neat row on the stage, had each individual graduating student stand on the stage and, while exchanging comments with a deliberately relaxed pace, they, quite carefully, handed out the graduation certificates on the notes of Chopin's *Farewell* étude played live.

Everybody ended up crying. This was unavoidable.

The summary of the comments was simple.

To the point that, assuming one knew the resume of the teacher, the words *I will now speak to you all of the memories I had with this student* would suffice.

Except for that, it could be said to have been an extremely refined affair.

The choice of vocabulary was appropriately unfair, it was tinged with an abundance of variegated rhetorical flourishes, the emphasis on the nonessential efficiently jolted the consciousness, and as soon as it looked like it would depict reality with level-headedness, it became a lyrical performance of anthropomorphization of the classical beauties of nature, with the silences surfacing in the pauses between sentences becoming brief intervals that better conveyed loquacity, and thus the congratulatory address, showered in from every side with lacking sophistication, left, once noticed, a praiseworthy, lasting impression... and once all of that had moistened beyond necessity both of the eyes of the graduating student standing on the stage, it came to an easy conclusion like good punctuation.

Whatever else, I believe that this was being done to us on purpose.

I was taken down, not lasting even a full minute, but the other students were much the same. It was such that even my friend Y, who extremely disliked showing emotions in front of others, had tears in her eyes behind her glasses once she returned from the stage.

On thinking about it, this was a surreptitious payback of the teachers towards the students who made them do hard work, was it not. I do think it gave off enough of that sensation for that to be plausible.

When what resembled official bullying ended, all our hands held on to graduation certificates, shining white without a spot on them.

Us spending over ten years of our time there, learning things of all sorts and having all kinds of experiences, was exclusively to receive this single piece of paper. However, similarly to how the document resembled in its weight a feather, the impression it left was that the finish of this was all too unsatisfying.

We each took a wilted flower as memento, putting it inside our photo album and turning it into a pressed flower. Photographs, too, had become things not for the ordinary folks. Despite how they would recall that time when flipped through, the memories had already begun to be tinged with transience.

The sad loneliness burst forth right there, alongside the farewell party held at the auditorium.

The way in which I find myself unable to fully describe that is because it was chaos itself, and I believe that becoming a chronicler without any interest in going against an event's nature meant wishing to record only the elements that constituted it and nothing else.

It was mainly comprised of things as follows.

Tasty things I had never seen before carried in / colorful fruits scattered around the floor / thin crackers, seemingly handmade / the cork of champagne blowing through the air / an improvised piano performance / graduates straining their voices in shouts / graduates crying / graduates laughing / graduates mucking about too much and letting their personas slip (this was me) / my friend Y returning from the toilet after about ten minutes with the corner of her eyes red and swollen / elderly guests pouring each other drinks / the graduating men surrounded and being made to drink alcohol without pause / the hoarse timbre of a jazz trumpet / an older lady I did not know who cried as she took my hands / confused chanting / older men and graduates jumbled together as they cried / the short and long hands overlapping as they announced twelve at night–

The School had been the last education institution that humanity had left.

The former universities, the former cultural associations, the former NGOs... The School was born as an organization from their integration, an event that appears to have happened over a century in the past.

The merging of educational organizations, alongside the accelerating decrease in population, was a scene seen in every land throughout the world.

As population decreased, the children decreased.

The number of students became insufficient.

And so the other educational institutions fused, their school districts and fields expanded...

that was a trend that did not appear would ever get bucked.

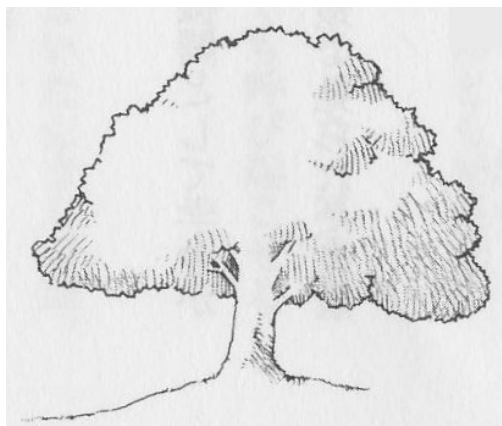
The rest was a downhill road.

The cities with schools had been gathering children from around the world since fifty years in the past, and the scenes of living in a school dormitory in order to receive education became common.

With us twelve graduates, The School, which could have been called humanity's last educational organization, would be shut down.

And now I was making the journey back to my hometown with my posterior hurting.

A large shadow loomed in the direction we were headed.



It was a large camphor tree. This tree was burned into my child's heart, and I recalled it well. It was a tree that served almost to demarcate the split between The Village and the outside world.

It was the only conspicuous presence in this one area, where, within the wild, luxurious growth of weeds, the ruins of family homes dotted the landscape as if remembering that they had to be present.

With a child's feet, it was an almost three hours trip from The Village to the camphor tree with. The children of The Village all went to this tree, using it as a landmark for their excursions. In this truck, if things went well, it should take around two hours, I believe.

Leaning back into the cargo, I relaxed myself.

A new life in The Village awaited me.

With my job at The Village decided at the same time as my graduation, I had chosen to throw myself into this harsh path, making my way down it by my own self.

With cultural anthropology as first, I gained a variety of knowledge and skills in the over ten years of continued education at The School, and the time had come to make active use of them. As a single, individual student I was still quite green, that indeed I was. This difficult journey was said to require the strength of youth, and, whether one liked it or not, allowed neither compromise nor concessions nor resignation nor indolence, and without inquisitiveness to the point of fastidiousness one was unlikely to even expect to lay hands on the greatest successes. That said, I did have the ambition of becoming accomplished as a young researcher. Youth I also did have. The chance to make that desire real I also held in hand. At this point, I found that pursuing my role to the utmost of my abilities was the sole and only path that I could choose.

But that said, there was no easy way to make ambition real.

Soon as we reached the side streets, the shaking that reached me stopped on the dot.

We had entered Kusunoki Village, the Village of the Camphor Tree, of course. As expectable from land in which people lived, the terrain was fruitful.

"Nhh~~ghh~~."

Having covered my eyes with a wet towel and forcibly laid down in between the wooden crates, I had noticed that only by the force of the shaking.

Conversely, it seemed that I had wasted my stamina, and neither the strength to lift myself up nor to open my eyes came to me.

Fumbling with my hands I searched for the cargo bed's edge, so that I could use the strength of my arm to lift myself up.

"Nhh~~~~ghh~~~~."

Though I was turning into an inchworm, I finally got into a stance in which I could grasp the edge, and there I exhaled a breath that was like a moan. As my stomach was already about to overturn from the excessive shaking, something sour was constantly rising up all the way to my throat.

In what was essentially a pull-up I lifted my face, put just my chin on the edge of the cargo bed, and at last opened my eyes.

I found that the truck was advancing, weaving its way around the empty spaces between houses.

I could see house fences so close they were at a distance I could touch them if I just extended my hand. Even the main street that was past the residential district of the Village was almost too cramped for this massive bulk to pass through.

The time for my reunion with my beloved land was approaching, indeed.

Having recovered my willpower somewhat, I ran my gaze all around, inspecting the surroundings.

Homes in good condition were built as if leaning onto each other, and several of the retrofitted tin-metal smokestacks were emitting thick and dense smoke. People were making food, of course.

The houses with people in them were generally painted with vivid pastel color paint, making them quickly distinguishable. Although their condition was generally good, there were many buildings wizened from the several hundred years that had passed since their construction. Going without paint was quite unthinkable, but I had also never seen an exterior wall corroded by the acid rains.

Thus these pastel houses were, in the present era, a part of culture that could be said to be ingrained in people's memories from childhood.

The scene unfolding before my eyes sequentially revived the memories of my infancy, and they matched in ways both interesting and amusing.

There was only one house painted pink in The Village.

It was the community center, frequently visited for its picture books and as a goal for games.

Meanwhile, an old lady with a passion for making sweets dwelt in the house colored a fluffy milk white, and when children visit bringing ingredients she would make all sorts for them.

Where the truck was headed with its careful driving was the square.

The square was a circular empty lot that had been created by destroying several buildings. As my gaze fell on it, I could see that a crowd of people was already standing in wait.

"Wah!"

On the spot I grew embarrassed and withdrew my head.

Meeting again with old acquaintances made me feel an odd shame. I was very poor at speaking in front of crowds to begin with. Individually, if at all possible I wanted to greet them individually... however, the caravan continued to bathe in people's attention, and its bulk advanced all the way through to The Village's square and parked there.

Seeking a spot that couldn't be seen from the rear step as the cargo was unloaded, I slid myself in the space opened in between the wooden crates and the side edges. This spot was good. If I sat on the floor, hugged my knees, and lowered my head, I should remain hidden. I decided to remain here until the excitement had died down.

That said, it appeared the world was not so nice as to allow me that. The side edge was also lowered to the shrill squeaking sound of a crank being turned. And lowered precisely in the section where I was hiding because it blocked off the gazes. The gazes of the townsfolk gathered there to receive supplies stabbed me all at once as I made my appearance, still hugging my knees.

The pipe slipped off and fell from the mouth of the older man waiting in the very front row.

It appeared this truck was the type that opened not just from the back, but also from the sides.

A middle aged woman, whom I knew by face, groaned in puzzlement. Just like I had memories of her, she had—

"I'm sure of it, you're...?"

I quietly hid my head between my kneecaps.

Having had embarrassment showered on me to the content of the hearts of the people in the square, I was utterly worn down in both mind and body as I dragged myself in front of my home and laid a hand on its door.

"I have returned... Grandfather?"

From deep within the dimly illuminated house out came my grandfather, his figure with his white lab coat entirely unchanged from my memories, and holding a hunting rifle in his hands.

Feeling that he had not aged given how he barged straight towards me, I was quite relieved inside.

"Oooh, so you've come back at last."

My Grandfather, well built for being an old man, put a hand on my head, despite it being located fairly high for my being a woman.

"Good, you seem to have grown vertically."

"...it is because years have passed."

On that subject, in these last few years my height has grown like I was a horsetail. So much that if I were to grow any further I would be in sort of a bind...

"Complexion looks good too. The carrots?"

"...I still loathe them."

Grandfather snorted.

"What, you haven't grown at all inside, then?"

"I have, I believe... maybe."

"Well, come inside. I was just thinking of getting something to eat."

"What? You are going out hunting now?"

I asked that as I stared at the hunting rifle in his hands.

"There's no point in going this late, I'd say. I was just tinkering with this to increase its firepower."

Grandfather loved guns.

"You came on the caravan, right?"

"Yes, grandfather."

I avoided discussing the troubles I had.

"Ah, also, Grandfather. I was just thinking of asking, if I may, but both you and I are going to be Mediators, and so..."

"I got me some fine watercress here. It'll do well both fried and in bread."

My voice, which was appealing to my being now a grown-up, mercilessly went through one of Grandfather's ear and out the other.

Soups of vegetables and dried meat, varieties of ingredients such as fried fish / vegetables / pickles, and round bread cut to slices to hold those in between were set up on the dinner table inside baskets.

Everything had been prepared by Grandfather.

As Grandfather was an older man living alone, he was highly competent at preparing food. He preferred food with strong flavor, such as meat roasted whole or smoked, but at times he made me soup with a more delicate flavor. It has been several years since I had last smelled this nostalgic scent.

While carefully making a sandwich to my tastes, with plenty of pickles, I addressed Grandfather, the other person sitting at the table.

"I see, so The School itself has come to an end at last, huh."

"Indeed, and many of its people had come to the farewell party... it was quite surprising."

"So that happened. Us too, when it came to close up, everybody remotely connected to it gathered up... but seriously, you haven't dropped that habit of setting up that shop, have you?"

Five built sandwiches laid in a neat row before me.

"Making them while eating means it is impossible for me to settle down... is it a problem?"

"Nah, it's not like I care."

I happened to end up quite concentrated as I made all of these.

My friends call it the habit of part time job, my family the habit of setting up shop, both call it some way, this habit of my hands'.

"You gonna eat all that?"

"No, it would be impossible. Of course it would be."

I said that without shame.

"Dumbass."

Grandfather's hands pillaged two of them.

"You got taller in height, but you remained the exact same weakly little creature, have you."

"Call me a civilized person, if you please."

"Former, you mean, former. There's almost no civilization left here."

"And now that you say it, it is the first time that I have ridden on a truck powered by solar light."

"That thing, huh. It got no speed nor horsepower, and if it breaks down I'm guessing it's in a way that won't be fixable."

"Happily, it has returned without any stops."

"Them caravan guys have lots of nice toys. Wish you too had gotten a job there. It looks fun."

"Ah, well... I am quite unsuited to physical labor, and so..."

Grandfather's expression changed like if he had remembered something.

"You seriously want to work here at home? It's not a job I'm forcing you to inherit from me or anything."

"But that is what I wish. I went and even got a degree, so I should be maintaining the office, should I not. I believe it a good thing that I have a place to be that is officially recognized."

"You dang weirdo. Becoming a Mediator, of all things."

"I do believe it a job I am suited for."

"Huh, and the reason is?"

"...I guessed it was better than working the fields."

Sitting together in this friendly a manner for the first time in a long while made my real thoughts tear through.

"And that's the reason why...?"

Grandfather said that with an of course astonished voice.

I gave him a very strained gaze as I boldly said this.

"You are also aware that my body is quite frail, are you Grandfather?"

"Yeah, but you said that you wanted to do it because you want it easy."

...did I say that?

"No, it is simply that, in this generation, practice of farming and rearing animals is included in the basic curriculum, and... those were quite harsh to carry out. And there, even the elderly can work well as Mediators, therefore it is a job that does not present physical problems, that was my reasoning."

I could speak to a flesh and blood relative without any strain whatsoever.

"...my granddaughter came back with a weird personality."

"Perhaps."

"Besides, you're not physically weak, you're simply lacking in willpower."

"Huh."

"You keep staying comfortable and when you take on years you won't be able to work steady, yanno."

"Huh."

"...bof, if you still think that after a month's passed you'd be really something."

"It is a hard job, then?"

I have of course done my preliminary research regarding the job when i took my credentials for working as Mediator. As a result, and compared to self-supporting jobs such as farming and the like, I determined that it was quite the comfortable subject, but... could it be that the actual practice was different?

That doubt Grandfather answered with a brief sentence.

"It depends on the person."

I tilted my head in puzzlement. Does it, in the end, have parts classifiable as hard labor?

"Well, try and get toyed with by *them* just once, my useless granddaughter."

"Those are quite the harsh words."

"Well, it's just that anyway. Come up to the office tomorrow. Gotta make some space for you."
And that was how it went.

A dawn came that I hadn't welcomed in ten-odd years, and it was eight o'clock already.

"This is terrible...!"

This may as well be called indolence. It was the accumulated tiredness from the voyage, there was no mistaking that. Or rather, come now, there was no way I would not be tired. I rushed out of the room in a panic and gave a glance to how things were in the kitchen.

Grandfather was picking out breakfast.

"Well now, you're noisy."

"Ah... good-, morning..."

"Mh-hm, 'morning."

So he said as he continued breakfast. Calmly.

This was bizarre. It was an oddity. I lost my words and, with an unease that made me wonder whether I wasn't seeing some mistake, I stood stock still for a moment.

"...what're you doing?"

"Ah, well, you see..."

Having lost my parents very young, I have lived with Grandfather since I was little.

Grandfather's principles when raising me were Spartan. If I overslept and was therefore late for breakfast, a hard fist always fell down on the top of my head. And now that had not come, what did it mean? He forgot about it, did he not? Even when I violated the curfew of six PM, or when I forgot to do one of the house jobs that I was told to, I, without missing one, took a fist. I am not even sure whether he could forget about it...

"I'm gonna go out soon. What're you gonna do? Didn't you have to show face up at the office today?"

"Ah, of course... that is what I mean to do."

A meal was already prepared at my seat. This scene too I have not seen in a long while. I decided to be grateful and eat.

"Well, what're you gonna do? Maybe you wanna come with. Or are you taking a break today?"

"Me-, meaning that it would be fine if I took a break?"

Though that would never be allowed in Sparta?

With a face like it was completely obvious, he said this back at me.

"It's not like you need to hurry to work today right after that yesterday, I'd say. You heard me last night when I said your determination was weak. Your complexion isn't good, either. Yeah, it's natural that sitting on the cargo bed and getting shaken for long hours toppled your

physical condition. I asked around and they said they found you sitting in a triangular shape, trembling just like you were cargo, but—

I wanted to shout out a big loud *nnnOOO*.

Kusunoki Village, the Village of the Camphor Tree, was of course located at the very edge of trade routes. Despite this being an age where individuals could not freely use personal transportation mechanisms, information propagated instantly via mere analog ways (as rumors in the wind).

"But I a-a-a-am feeling pe-e-e-rfectly fine..." this is where I suppressed my shaking, "I am sickly, I am a young lady unhappy and despairful in my secluded room. That is why I will come fashionably late."

I went and really said it!

"....."

This was bad, I was being looked at with the eyes one had for a pitiable person.

"...i-, is there any problem?"

"Nah. Can say that for a *maiden* all *unhappy* in her *secluded room* we at least got the job of counting fallen leaves at the window side."

"So there is none."

"I'll search for one."

"It is all right if it comes similar to a novel based around sanatoriums, correct?¹"

"Sure thing is, from the outside it's not like it you don't look like one."

Yes, from the exterior I truly looked like that.

With my fear of strangers spurring it on even further, as a living being I wholly fill the niche of '*taciturn and proper young lady*'. Whereas children of the current age were comparatively burly, the personality type I had inherited was one of firm immobility.

As my true personality was revealed the more familiar I was with someone, my harsh friend Y handed down without any shyness on her face the judgment of *walking scam*.

"Bof, not that I mind," said Grandfather as he drank away his tea. "I'm going out now. If you feel like you can come later, come by."

"Of course, I will do as you say."

"You still remember the place, right?"

"Uhm, it was that building with the shape like that of pancakes, correct...?"

"That's right. I'll be there until noon today, so if you wanna come, you should do it before then. Put the dishes in the water before leaving."

Rapidly twirling on his white lab coat, he promptly went outside.

Feeling left behind, I fell into a vague state of dumbfoundment.

In the end, there had been no corporal punishment for sleeping late.

For me, raised since I was young to free and inevitable punishment (with achievements going without any praise whatsoever and vices inevitably punished, an evil way of rearing someone), this felt difficult to become calm about.

Grandfather truly had no mercy:

so what had happened that made him become so soft!

It was not like I really wanted to receive corporal punishment, however...

I finished my breakfast with my mood just not rising.

"Now then, what shall we do."

I was hesitant to hurry up and go to the office. Until I had fully swallowed this vague feeling of

1 The original Japanese term googles to Thomas Mann's [The Magic Mountain](#), but I've no idea how that fits into this conversation.

depression currently in my chest, I was in the mood of putting something before to soften the blow.

I decided first of all to put the dishes in the water reservoir, then to search around inside the cramped house.

My dear nostalgic home.

My home, which appeared identical, but differed from my memories in details such as spots on the walls and decorations and more.

It was a fun little while to compare and contrast past and present.

It took a fifteen minutes walk along the raised paths over the rice paddies.

This large building, with its round arena-like shape, was the Cultural Center of Kusunoki Village.

In this building that looked like piled pancakes Grandfather, who was affiliated with the UN Mediator Committee, managed leisure, leisure, leisure, and official duties. With a ratio of around 3/3/3/1.

Same as the Colosseum that existed in that distant foreign country, part of the top had collapsed and was missing, but do not fret about it.

It was a rare large structure conveniently reused since it had had little in the way of damage thus far.

The term Cultural Center was an official name that the building had had even in its past.

No mistake, this was surely used with the goal of instructing the locals with culture.

Given its size and the number of its rooms, at present it is being used as an office building. It is university laboratory and research facility and private office and religious location and warehouse and more and all sorts. It is truly being used in a wide variety of ways. So I am able to say, but its coming to be packed that way happened seemingly fifteen years ago. At present the majority of rooms are either empty or, with the delegates no longer there, left abandoned as they were, which made it a very good place for the children around here to play in.

"Excuse me!"

The door I opened to enter inside had its glass long since gone, and was shoddily covered with boards.

The dimly lit hall not only had dried filth laying all over, but for some reason only one of a pair of shoes was laying there on the floor, which indeed gave the impression of the place being abandoned.

And naturally the reception was deserted.

Climbing a staircase spiraling in ways that reminded me of a bamboo-copter, I headed for the third floor office where Grandfather was.

The UN was what it was called, however until I had come by, only Grandfather was employed in this entire land.

If anything happened to Grandfather, then the case officer of the UN would come to no longer be. There was no end to facilities that had been shut down because of that same specific reason.

This is truly a Period of Decline.

I did not have quite a grasp on the precise location, which annoyed me.

"Ah, here..."

I spotted a door that had a sign saying United Nations Mediators Committee and knocked on it.

...no answer came.

"Excuse me if you ple~ase!"

I tried knocking only once more, but there was no response.

It appeared there was no presence of people whatsoever, either.

Exhaling a sigh, I carefully turned the knob. Though I was doing nothing wrong, my heart fluttered a little.

"...Grandfather? Wait, woah..."

I entered and was shocked.

One of the walls was adorned with all sorts of guns.

They were clearly his private property.

Besides, it might have been my imagination, but it felt like the smell of gunpowder permeated the entirety of the room. But of course, he certainly did not go that far, right...? That is correct, is it?

Excluding that boldly violent fixture, for the rest it seemed to be a proper office.

The floor was of dense gray, its linoleum peeling off, there were three work desks set up haphazardly, and, separated by a partition, there was a tiny space with a sofa and everything set up for receiving visitors.

As there was only one desk that felt like it was in use, that was likely Grandfather's. I could tell, since documents were piled up high, there was a cup and a pen holder and memos and more scattered about in a state of chaos.

Also, on a more accurate glance at another desk, I found that it felt used. That one was oddly ordered, and on its surface there was nothing more than several paperbacks and a pen, it was certainly used by someone but they did not appear to be doing a proper job. Grandfather was perhaps monopolizing both on his own.

The remaining one was brand new. It was a desk with no traces of having been used.

Why, that was going to be my domain, of course.

"How dusty..."

Seems the first day's job will be cleaning the desk.

Still, it was quite an easy job when compared to farm working, therefore I shall refrain from even a single complaint, *yessah*.

Incidentally, as the reception area with the sofa and all also made for the storage location of oil lamps, the main source of illumination at nighttime, it made for clear evidence that we were lacking in guests.

For now I sat down on the chair and stayed at my wits' end.

"Well now, what shall we do, hmmm."

Now that I looked carefully, in the back of the office there was a door leading to the adjacent room. The instant I noticed it, the door opened and Grandfather came out.

"Oh, you came."

"Hello."

"That where you're sitting now, that's your place."

He showed with his chin what I had imagined.

"Of course, I very much appreciate it."

"Congratulations on your appointment to the office."

Grandfather smiled with a grin as he said that.

"Yes, thank you very much."

"I guess I'm gonna make some tea. Ah, there's hours where you can use the plumbing here, but it comes from the rain pool on the rooftop, so no drinking that. Rule here's that you bring

your own fresh water."

"It may be a rule, but you are here alone, Grandfather, are you."

"With you we're now three."

Leaving that said, he returned back to the room he'd left. It appears that the other side was designated as office kitchenette.

"Here."

"Thank you very much," I said as I accepted the tea from Grandfather after he'd returned, then, "so there are two of you?"

"Mh? Didn't Okuzuki tell you?"

Okuzuki-san was the staff member of the UN.

An OG from The School, and the person who went along with my post-graduation career choices. Sad to say I have only had contact with him via letters, I have never met him face to face.

"About what?"

"About Assistant."

"What, I am new at this job and I just get an assistant out of nowhere?"

"You playing dumb or something? He's my assistant."

"Ahhh."

Quite the shocking assertion.

"Sooo, there actually was a third person."

As far as deviations from the plan went, this fit into the topmost category.

"I always wonder about it, but do you still have that thing, that stage fright thing?"

"It is not quite stage fright, but... well, I must ask. This Assistant is an elderly lady, is she?"

"Nope, he's a young man."

"Ahhh..."

An undiluted solution of despair began gushing out, and the tone of my voice went dropping.

"Bet he was a fellow student at The School. What're you so afraid of?"

"...of this society with its extremely low birth rate. Since I was in the very last class, you see. There were none of opposite sex with an age close to mine. The closest were four years younger... well, it took several years, but I did get used even to those children, however."

"Be at ease. He's an untalkative guy, totally harmless."

"No, the vector of that sort of worry is sort of different, is it not?"

"If it's that difficult you can always use the other room, right?"

And he pointed over there.

"It's cramped, but there's space for one person to stay there."

"...no, having special treatment of that extent would be, well..."

"What a hard to please granddaughter I have. Is your problem that serious?"

"Nooo, welll, it is not that I have serious problems, it is simply a bit of my weak point and," *sigh*, I replaced the air inside my body and tried slapping my cheeks a little. "Understood. This will be part of the price for an easy clerical trade, and I will maintain my strategy of acting the Secluded Young Lady even at my job."

"What strategy would that be?"

"One where I will remain employed as an untalkative person, so you will not be able to speak to me very often."

"Boring life, that..."

"Please leave it be. So, how come that person is not presently here?"

"Yeah, well, I heard a doctor's come with the caravan. He's getting a checkup."

"Is he feeling bad, physically?"

"Seems so. That's one person who actually got a weak constitution. As they're firing things up at the hospital, it seems that this area will be without power for a while."

These days electricity was not allocated equally everywhere.

"Heard he'll come to be hospitalized for the checkup, so he won't come back for a while. You should build your nest while it's now, and make yourself a space for you to mentally rest while you're there."

"Treating people like they're some small animal or a kind of bird..."

"Hoh. Then you're fine with the desk staying there? Your desk and his are facing towards each other, so if you stay like that you'll be looking at him every day, you know."

No good. I started fumbling about in a panic for a more comfortable desk position.

The ideal would be a position which nobody's gazes reached, but from which I could unidirectionally monitor things. At The School, well, I was always in the last row due to my height, which was a relief.

Ahhh, over there, that would be so nice...

I thought earnestly as I looked at the reception space.

"Grandfather, behind that partition..."

"Can't go over there. That's the reception. At times we do have guests."

"But it is just where you store the oil lamps, is it not."

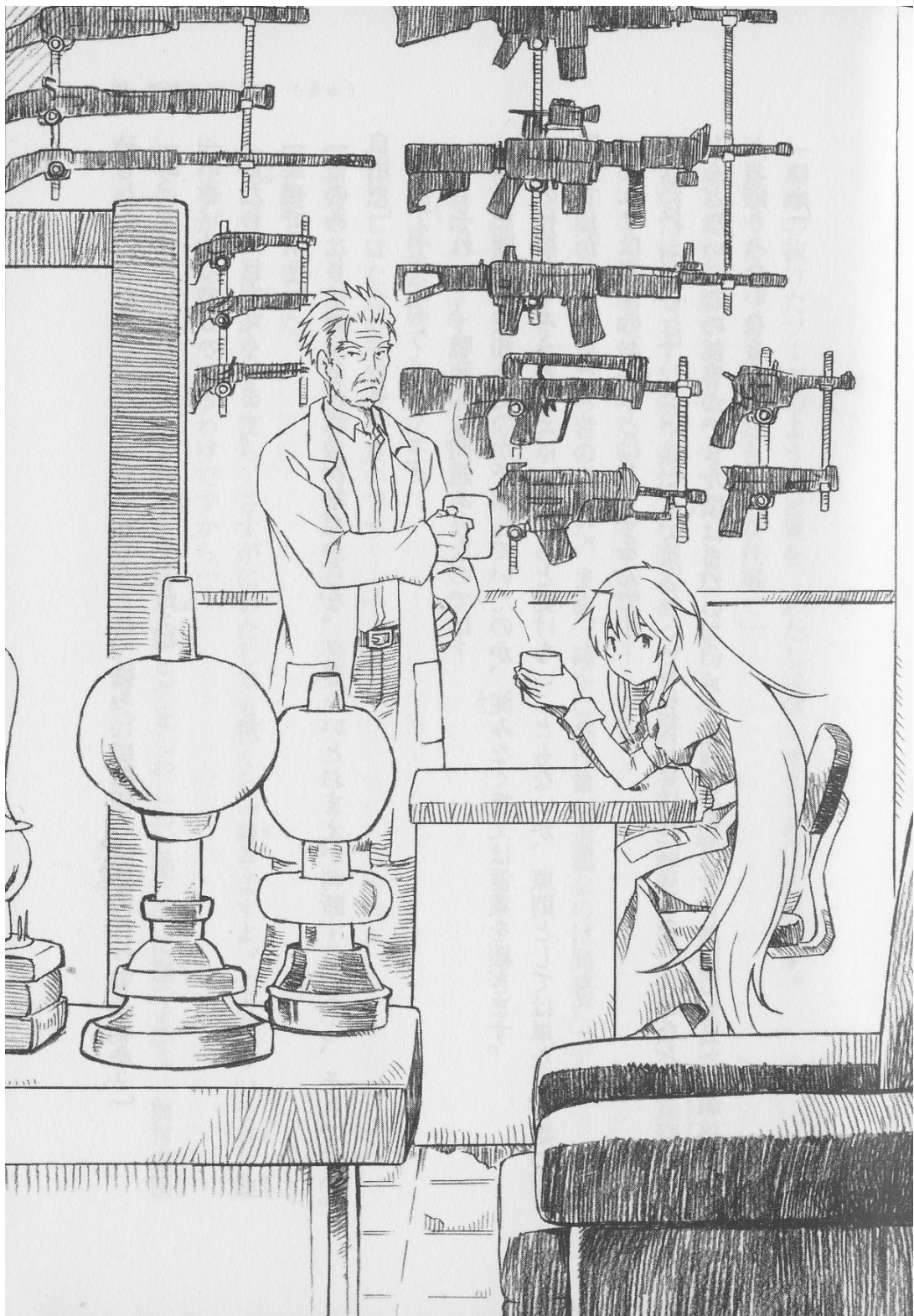
"When a guest comes all I need to do is move the lamps. Regardless, you can't go in the reception. For an office in decline, having a cramped little reception area, partitioned against the flow of things, really brings out the mood."

"Again with the weird theories..."

Grandfather was a man of hobbies.

"That's right. With documents and all that stuff, there's nothing you need to do until you take over from me. Today you should take your time and make your nest, and think about the location."

"...of course."



"If you're in the mood for it, then you could try giving *them* a greeting from the new appointee?"

"Ah, not doing that would be a problem, of course?"

"Nah, you can do it later."

My eyes went wide.

"How come?"

"Because it depends on the discretion of the person in charge. If you decide that it's not necessary, that'll be it. You're free."

Free!

But that did present professional duty problems, what about that?

Having guessed or anticipated that question, Grandfather continued with his words without hesitating.

"When you try doing this job you'll see it, this doesn't fail to go in all sort of ways, but fundamentally we're nothing more than caretakers for documents."

"Well then, what do we do about the job of Mediators...?"

"*They* are what *they* are. There's nearly no things that we absolutely must do. Seems there were still lots of problems back when they established this office, but at present a Mediator and all that stuff are sort for show."

"Huh."

I accepted those words dazedly, like a soda lacking fizz.

"That's a good thing, isn't it. This is the easy job you wanted."

"There does appear to be a mistake, however, I have simply considered my physical condition and chosen a suitable job. Farm work has physical labor and exposure to sunlight and I cannot stand insects and has other things I do not like, so I simply avoided it."

"I can't hear those but as the words of a slacker. Well, farming is certainly boring, so I agree."

"Right? Right?"

Grandfather was a man of profligacy.

"Food should consist only of what you hunt."

We were also a race of hunters and gatherers.

"I am fine with being just a consumer..."

"It's people like you who've eaten through our culture."

I got criticized.

"If I had no other means to eat, even I would of course sow seeds, at least. But we still have jobs to be thankful for, such as this one, and so..."

"I guess it's as you say... mh-hm," and Grandfather amusedly stroked his stubble, wrinkling it.

"I take back those words. As a youth you would actually do better with doing a bit of hard work. Go greet them as the new appointee. Boss' order."

"I see, given that greeting them is of course necessary."

Now that it's proven that there is a third person, the office will come to have a fair bit of high tension to it. It will do for motivation to not avoid a bit of field work.

"And so, where would *their* village be located?"

"Ah, right."

A map of the area was affixed to the wall.

I approached it and traced the detailed features of the land with my fingers. The location of The Village was surrounded by a red frame, the dangerous areas were detailed, and a triangular mark of a seal was affixed in only one spot.

"Huh, but this...?"

"That's right, that's where *their* village is."

I double-checked it carefully.

"But this, is the place not mistaken? On the way back to The Village, I spotted one alongside the main road... this seal seems to be quite in the wrong location."

As I said that, Grandfather went 'hmmm'.

"Now, I don't know how to explain this. For now, how about you just go there? It's around thirty minutes from here. There's some hills there, it'll make for good exercise."

"Understood, I am going."

"Here, packed lunch."

Must've been Grandfather's between-meal snack. He handed me several round pieces of bread which he took out directly from his white lab coat. I wished he had at least wrapped them.

"As for bringing documents with... is that signature document needed for the greeting?"

"Of course you don't need any of that stuff. You bring a document to be signed and then do what? Just go there a while, and if you meet 'em, just give them a greeting."

"If I meet them?"

"That's because the population should be of a few. If it goes well, you should be able to even touch them."

"I am not quite sure I understand, but I will take the challenge."

"Here, water."

I was handed a bottle containing drinking water.

"As for the etiquette of the greeting and all those things, is there anything I absolutely must pay attention to?"

"Ain't any. Just keep going with your instinct."

"...already at this stage there are quite the differences with what I previously learned about the specifics of the job back when I was attending school."

"The documents used for you were a kind of support manual made under the situation at the time, which started with raw guesswork. That time was a difficult one, too, so decisions of a certain delicacy were sought, but at present they're all just relics of the past. Well, just have a go. Whatever else it's XP (experience points)."

"What is with that suspicious lingo..."

Walking up an incline that led to a somewhat tall hill I reached the area indicated with the triangular mark, *their* village.

Before becoming a village, far further in its past, the area was used by resource collector laborers as a storage plot.

The collected resources... bluntly speaking the furniture-sized garbage came to remain over here even after the laborers had gone.

"...so tall."

A fridge without a door / a washing machine perfectly split near its center / broken speakers / an amp with every single one of its buttons removed / blown tires / a guitar with its strings cut / a microwave oven glossy with oil / a neatly folded bike of the non-foldable type...

All these things were piled up to a height several times mine.

They were all things that we had no means of reusing in present times, and as rust and deterioration and the decline of engineering made it also impossible to reuse them as resources, they had been left abandoned for a long while.

The fence surrounding the mountain of trash remained uncollapsed, and the gate leading

inside the plot was sealed with a chain.

To continue onwards I had to open the gate, but I naturally possessed no kind of key.

Of course, being a youthful maiden, one to whom supra-normal powers the likes of which could destroy the chain were entirely foreign, it did appear that I would have to withdraw for today...

"ei!"

Yanked, it shredded comparatively easily.

I was about to do something more, just in case, but the chain was rusted.

And with that, I could continue my field work.

Being there was no manager either, entering the facility without permission or destroying things was not a problem. This place was utterly forsaken.

First I was to approach just a little that mountain of garbage that had attracted my attention.

It was in danger of collapsing so I did not draw too close. First of all, no one will save me if I was swallowed up by it. That said, what *they* preferred were regardless places like these.

There might be something here that stimulates a childlike heart, perhaps. This would be a spot that a young boy who loved mischief would have liked.

I decided to walk around without any particular goal.

I discovered the place where the management's building was. As tempered by the many years and the weather, the state of that building was that of only foundation.

"Anybody the~re?"

I tried calling out, but there was no reply.

This was the place indicated by the triangular mark so there should be no mistake, but *they* were hiding and I could not even feel their presence.

It may even be possible that *they* could be hiding underneath this perfectly flat stone. I lifted it up to check, but there were only insects equipped with shears transformed into spheres.

"...how rude of me."

I carefully returned the stone to where it was.

After that I decided to go around the mountain of garbage at a distance, but made no new discovery.

"Is there anybody~?"

No answer to that either. Whatever the reason this place appeared entirely devoid of anyone.

Although I came here for a greeting as the new appointee, there was nobody that could be subject of mediation, and therefore I could do nothing whatsoever.

What I could do at that moment was, well...

"...thank you for the food."

To abruptly take out the round bread from my pockets and stick it in my mouth, nothing else.

Returning to the office, I made my report to Grandfather, who was playing at aiming with a gun at a distant family house from the window seat.

"There was a mountain of garbage with nobody there, so I ate the bread and drank the water there."

"It was good, wasn't it?"

"They had an altogether normal taste of bread and water."

"Well, guess they would."

"I could gain no experience whatsoever at that place."

"Just think of it as a fun casual walk."

"Grandfather, you knew that there was going to be nobody there, did you?"

"Yeah. Ain't nobody whatsoever at that mountain of trash."

I exhaled a sigh.

"I should call that a waste of my efforts."

"You don't understand the plans of your grandfather, then, who made his gutless granddaughter do some exercise."

"I dislike physical exercise."

Grandfather covered his eyes with one hand. He appeared exasperated. This seemed to give him a blow, then,

"...forget it."

He handily ignored it.

While feeling that as anticlimactic inside, I went to verify the conclusion I had come to.

"In short, there is nothing whatsoever at the place where that triangular seal is affixed, it is a mere lie, is that what you are saying?"

"It's not quite like that. *They* like places where the breath of people remains. Potentially there should be an adequate number of *them* in this land."

I go hmmm.

"But Grandfather, there is an article in the job of Mediator that says we have to understand *their* situation and record it..."

"Mh-hm, there is."

"If that is a place where none gather, then it is neither understanding nor recording, is it not?"

"That there's a place where everybody's work went," said Grandfather as he sipped his coffee. "It forced even me to be crafty in all sorts of ways."

"Then please teach me those tricks."

"That's impossible."

"...is this workplace bullying, perhaps?"

They were by nature beings who excelled at seclusion.

Therefore, having gone feral and living in solitude, it is difficult for humans who can neither read the wind nor conceal their presence to observe *them*.

"Without working out the knacks by your own self you'll never be able to take over the job, no matter how long you take, right? If you got the mind to do things, then I still think that that was good practice."

"I am positively crackling with willpower, however I still wish to make use of the knowledge of those that came before me, if that is available."

"Thinking about that is also the job."

...for some reason that made me somewhat angry. I wanted to get something from him no matter the cost.

"Still, I am also a new person here, so please show me the pattern, Grandfather."

"No, I have things that I gotta do. I employ an assistant also for that purpose."

"It is natural for the boss to have plenty of work to do, of course. But I am still a greenhorn when it comes to this field, and I wish to be efficient in the absorption of skills and experience, so I can ride the highway of knowledge and quickly become a full-fledged member, and so I can ride the highway of knowledge and quickly become a full-fledged member."

"She said it twice... and the exact same thing..."

Grandfather lost his presence of mind for a little while. I got quite the mood of having won.

"Impossible is just something you dislike doing, correct?"

"I get it, that's your opinion, enough. So tiresome..."

Must be the wisdom of age, I presume, as Grandfather regained his balance right away.

"To put it simply, there's nothing whatsoever that I could teach you. It's not like I've been doing much work to begin with. I got nearly none of that know-how you want so badly, and I never got involved in any level of activities worth mentioning either."

"This was sort of a golden parachute for you, was it?"

"...it was."

He has admitted it without shame.

"Golden parachute or not, in my case, the result would've been the closure of the research facility. If I was to keep it in this land whatever the cost, I was told I would have to take over the position of Mediator even if just as a title, and that's how it went. I don't have any meritorious achievements in my work as a Mediator, either."

"Just as a title..."

"It's a job that doesn't require acting all that formally or putting on a bold front, either. Not words I should be telling you, the ones I'm gonna say, but... I'm thinking that *they* don't need any sort of leadership from us."

"But in case of emergencies..."

"You describe it as an emergency based on what, that's the point. Unless we intervene ourselves, *they* rarely show themselves. If there's no contact there's no friction, either. It's like quick wit or philosophy, it's whether doing nothing isn't just the best thing to do as Mediators."

"That there would make the meaning of the existence of the job of Mediator as..."

"I can't find them, that's that."

"Nggh..."

An impact such that I might have fainted backwards while still sitting on the chair.

That is definitely the easy intellectual job that I desired. That being said, should I have been asked whether I wished to have a pointless job my answer would have been a clean and utter NO!, and in short what I wished for was living with highly efficient fruitfulness.

"And I thought Mediator was an important post..."

"A hundred or two hundred years ago or something and it might've been."

"Ngh..."

"Besides, in these times in which the currency system has collapsed and people returned to barter, there is no such thing as an important post at all. This stuff is like that, you know, something like assistance, or rather, a section that was historically important and so has applicants, and as it does it has employees in it, it works out as something of an inertia... look, your initial salary, a bunch of miscellaneous tickets has already been delivered to me."

A slim envelope made a cartaceous sound as it was thrown on top of the desk.

"B-, but the end of the month thing?"

"At the end of the month the caravan that acts as distribution center would've gone back, I believe. I'm handing it before that."

"I-, it does sound like it has no thankfulness to it, however...?"

"It had none to start with, not this stuff."

With my heart having taken damage, I was at a loss for words. Those words devoid of dreams and hope that a Grandfather told to his heartbroken granddaughter became even further mental abuse as they assailed me.

"And so, the work of Mediator I leave all to you to pick up. I've no idea how it's done, but bof, do it as you please. You know how it is. If you got an urge for hard work, can't you just write down reports or something and submit them?"

I thought that as a combo declaration of irresponsibility that included what was effectively a declaration of retirement.

"Seriously Grandfather, that is most certainly not acceptable, I would say. Since you are my superior you should at least... seriously, could you stop messing with guns when we are halfway through a conversation?"

"Next week we're going hunting, been waiting so long."

He jutted the polished muzzle of the rifle out of the window, peering inside the scope.

"...what an abuse of golden parachute..."

"I'm still alive because I enjoy this. I'd really like for you to stop being so unromantic and always throw wet blankets on an old man's sorta dark past-times."

"And that despite how you yourself call them sort of dark."

Grandfather's determination seemed solid.

"Uhm... now then, in order to inherit this job as quickly as possible, I would like you to at least instruct me on the tricks of the trade, however."

"So you ask, right. I haven't worked seriously except for a really short time, and so... hummm, that's right... no, wait."

He stood up, thrust his arm inside a cabinet installed in the office, and examined the files from their side.

He loudly searched through the files, then finally found and took out a single thick file.

"There it is, start by looking around here. They're records from my predecessor. Stuff from people who were here before me, mind. Stuff that's from about thirty years ago, I think?"

"My, so we have that sort of hint books?"

"I can only hope there's hints in here, though."

I accepted it and made my eyes run on the content as I quickly paged through.

It was a record in the form of daily journal, which appeared to summarize preliminary steps in the form of a report.

Documented there were nothing less than the records of a young Mediator's strenuous struggles in building a favorable relationship with *them* (sentence includes wishful thinking).

Mixed with illustrations as requirements necessitated, it was a composition of days with *them*.

"This does appear that it will be of reference... by the way, where is this person?"

"Well, he died."

All things are a vicissitude of life and death.

"What was he... sort of a low profile guy. Cause of death was, I'm sure... I don't remember."

He appeared to wonder for a moment, but eventually he left an "I'm going out for a bit" behind, and still with his white lab coat he went outside.

Having been left alone, my eyes first of all fell on the file at my hand.

Day X Month O

Beginning today I will be one of the Mediators.

It's an occupation reduced to a mere shell of itself, but with the Power of Youth there should still be things that can be done.

I want to do my best.

I even did my greeting at *their* village.

It was a fair bit difficult, but as I asked the tricks of the trade to my predecessor, I think it went well.

Still hope we can build a good relationship.

Day X Month O

After chasing them down for several days, it seems I've been mostly accepted.

I've already gotten a chance to see their technology with my eyes.

I did hear the rumors, but they weren't on this scale...

I understand very well how important this duty is. I can't understand why the organization has curtailed it to this extent.

Wish I had a camera, at least...

I'll leave behind some sketches instead.

(Relevant section missing.)

Day X Month O

Today I had them prepare me a banquet.

A wonderful, warm welcome.

The best of treats.

Alcohol and meat, and then fish. Delicacies of mountains and seas. A variegated feast that used the fruit of trees.

I managed to spend a truly fulfilling time with them.

Day X Month O

Today too I received an amazing welcome.

There were so many treats I couldn't even tell what they were using as ingredients.

Besides, forget the fish, how did they come up with the meat?

I've never heard of them hunting.

I want to make this an important point to investigate.

Day X Month O

Every time I show my face I receive a zealously warm welcome.

The investigation won't progress like this, that's how my joyous scream ought go, I believe.

Interference in their affairs should be avoided, but I want to leave documents behind that people will talk about.

Day X Month O

The investigation walwy.

Was as always. Today too was a treat.

Day X Month O

Ahhh, another day of tasty treats with unknown ingredients.

All of the food was nothing less than a resurgence of our own food culture.

It was the first time I've had this 'beef steak' thing to eat.

Not something you can taste but rarely at present.

It has an unforgettable taste, what could be called the fruit of the meat.

Day X Month O

Today it was especially extravagant!

Rare flavors came one after the other.

It's enough food to drown in it.

I'm sure, these should've been the food of the ancient courts of China.

I wanted to progress the investigation, too, but... why, I have as much time as I could want. It's nothing to hurry about.

Day X Month O

I can feel my self being loved.

The special courses that they came out with all made me lick my lips.

What else are you saying I could need?

I can really get the feeling of how the old world was overflowing with rich flavors.

They also served a great variety of alcoholics. It's alcohol that works well on any day.

Day X Month O

Today it was sushi.

I could count the times I've had it, too, but it was really delicious.

And the crab soup was the best.

Day X Month O

Today it was turkey.

I don't quite like beans and mushroom, but I never thought they could be this delicious.

I drank while pinching the deep-fried stuff, and the local milk-white Raku, the drink made of fermented milk, was extremely good.

Day X Month O

If you have no bread, then let yourself eat cake.

Day X Month O

Today it was beef steak followed by beef steak.

Alcohol followed by alcohol.

Beef steak, alcohol, beef steak, alcohol, beef steak, alcohol...

Day X Month O

Beef... alcohol...

I closed the file without words. The window was tastily wide open, and if I were to *pshew* fling this out of it, it would certainly feel good, would it not.

An important document? This?

This falls under the category of utterly scandalous.

"How was it?"

Grandfather had returned.

"It was beef and alcohol."

"I see. That's nice. You recognized that."

Recognized it, well, what...

The last part, well, it was simply a list of what Iron Chef made him for dinner and nothing more.

"Honestly, I believe this is going to be of no reference at all, not this."

"I believe it was good reference in the sense that doing just this is fine, as far as the job goes."

"Uhm, I have grown a little concerned about your predecessor's cause of death..."

"I remembered it. It was liver cirrhosis."

I see. As expected, I must say.

"That is an extravagant way to die indeed, for this era."

"And thanks to that, you'll feel you've become more careful of eating and drinking too much."

"I eat little to begin with, if you please."

I wanted to tear at my hair.

"So, is there nothing else as far as files?"

"Well, how about giving a glance at what's in these drawers? Might hit up on things of use inside..."

"Ahhh, there is a massive number of... all of these..."

The cabinet was a large type for office use, and covered the near totality of one of the walls. If every part was crammed full of documents, who knows how long it will take to finish reading through them all, for one thing.

At that point I suddenly sank into thought.

If I were to fulfill my professional duties with earnestness, all that was going to happen was that I would be involved an inexhaustible supply of hardships, and then I would start wondering how nice it would be if I were to slothfully play hooky... that was the pattern that came to me. I wanted things easy. That was the fact. That said, it was not like I did not want to do anything.

I felt the contradicting urges of wanting to do the job and wanting things easy that existed within me.

"...on that subject, are there no files at all from you, Grandfather?"

"Nope. Nothing to leave behind, that's why."

And so I did think, but...

"Are you really, literally, doing nothing...?"

"I'm a supervisor in figure only, nothing else."

"I do get the reason why you cannot grace me with adequate advice."

"How rude... but I do have wisdom, you know. That's right... what you want here is groundwork for negotiation with *them*, which is the main job of a Mediator, right? And for that you want *them* to gather in a single place."

"Well, that is true."

In a complete revolution from his disappointed face, Grandfather showed me earnestness from indulgence in thought.

"How are you with sweet tastes?"

"Sweet tastes? Do you mean sugar and the like?"

"No, I mean the sweet stuff. There's gotta be all kinds. Of types of confectionery, that is. I'm asking because them guys like that stuff."

"So *they* can be lured out with sweets?"

"Right... this is an old trick, but the strategy is to bury a container in the ground and pour honey in it, then wait a night, the effect is said to be certain."

"Would that not just catch beetles..."

"They're both the same in how they're attracted to sweet nectar. *They* won't go against instinct."

"I have a great many things I would like to say, but setting them aside... based on what would this strategy be likely to draw in nothing except for a large amount of insects?"

"Well then, if you get 'em, just pick them away by hand."

"That would be traumatic."

"If that's what you say, you can't do field work."

"Well, I suppose so, but... I understand, I will attempt it. Thank you very much, Grandfather."

I grasped the envelope containing the rationing tickets and left the office behind me.

I approached the caravan stationed at the square, handed one of the rationing tickets to be exchanged for luxury goods, spotted a bottle packed with *them* from the items that could be chosen and picked it, and by the time I was headed home, the time was already right before six PM.

"I have come back home!"

"Ah, welcome back."

When I looked at the clock, I was sad to see that the hour had passed six PM by around one minute. I wanted to come back in a hurry, but this time we have a violation of curfew. Nothing to be done but give it up, it seemed.

"Well then."

I hung my head to apologize to Grandfather. That made it easy to hit.

"...what're you doing?"

"Oh my, going without punishment?"

"What's that I should punish?"

Oh dear dear and oh my my?

The sense that something was wrong was growing nicely.

But I avoided the foolishness that is poking a hornets' nest, and decided to promptly withdraw to my own room. I was not going to let good fortune escape me by attempting to determine the reason for my luck.

The next morning I gave a brief notice to Grandfather then left the residence headed straight for the location.

The mountain of garbage was unchangedly in deep and perfect silence, and there was no sign that anyone was hiding nearby.

Leaving a mark on the spot, I dug a hole with the shovel I'd brought with. Being a hole of a depth of about ten centimeters, the work was finished in an instant. There I buried an empty can. As preventive measure against bugs, I fixed the lip in a position a little higher than the ground.

The work was finished in a matter of mere minutes.

If I poured honey in this contraption and waited a night, when I came to see how things were the following morning there was indeed the possibility I might appear on the next Insect-Related Shock movie.

And so I thought this:

liquids were no good, that is what.

If I made them solid, the kinds that could intake of them would also decrease, would they not, and yes, this is a newbie's idea, however that is what I thought.

And for that I have prepared these, as well-stuffed in a bottle – konpeitos.

I poured until the bottom was about covered, and the rest was just waiting.

"Also, there's the funness of the place."

"The funness of the place."

Dodgy words numbering two.

Having made my return to the office, the words that I got when I once more begged for advice were those.

"If the funness is low, *their* activities decline. In particular, as long as *their* individual number is low, without an external cause *they* don't really stick around."

"Fun... is that like a festival or something of that sort?"

"It ain't just that. Games, sweets, dancing... there's all sorts of things *they* find fun."

"Again with the vague advice, I see."

"Did you try that thing? How was it? Catch any beetles?"

"I left it for six hours then went to see, but ants had built a conveyor belt and helped themselves, nothing else. There were actually no beetles."

Grandfather appeared a bit dissatisfied.

"That's 'cause you don't have enough fun. You gotta liven up the place more."

"And what should I do to increase the funness?"

"Well, I think there's lots of ways. For example, when you stick a flag into the rice you put in a children's lunch plate, go use a miniature flag."

"That does not seem like it would leave much of an impression."

I suspected Grandfather was indicating a conventional food that he saw omnipresent in the food service industry, did he, but that was not quite recognizable by my generation.

"To make an example of an example... ah, yes. Cutting vegetables in star shapes, that makes children happy."

"Ah, that kind of tricks, then. I have been in a biting fight with them many times while living at The School, however."

"Biting fight? That's a weird way to say it."

"That is because I was not defeated by them."

And there I reminisced about those days of eating that were so much like banquet fights.

On one hand, the dorm mother who, whatever else, became obsessed with the unrealistic yet deeply held belief of forcing children to eat carrots. On the other, our flesh and blood bodies which were absolutely determined to avoid the deglutition of that sweetness that filled our breasts with nausea.

Worse, nasty thing was, it was not just I who left carrots behind.

How the students of my same term all as one felt repulsed by that biannual apiaceae was mere coincidence, but how we all formally began leaving those things behind was an agreement on an intentional act.

The progress and changes chronicled in that conflict resembled all too nastily the present situation.

In the beginning there were few primitive exchanges. The reciprocal defenselessness could be compared to the progress of (now extinct) large mammals in a closed environment with no natural predators. They were offered roasted whole, made into SaladSticks™, cut into slices and boiled together with butter... their naked figures, without anything that could have disguised their origin, began often appearing on the dinner tables.

Eventually, the dorm mother noticed. And several things.

First, of the presence of carrots that returned untouched no matter how she presented them. There was no possibility she could fail to notice that. The dorm mother of course complained. However, eventually words that could be expected to have an effect vanished from the space between her and us as we continued our firm refusals. Wisely, she also noticed the meaninglessness of persuasion.

The words of threat disappeared, and the rest was only technological progress.

Cooking techniques such as carving them into the shape of stars could be said to have been the first step among first steps.

The unproductive quarrel eventually progressed until it came to the mixing in small quantities into a vegetable soup, a trick of extremely elevated standard, however what became more

remarkable than that was the secret intelligence network. To quote, "*today the people who bring in stuff were carrying a basket of them,*" or "*a box full of them was spotted in a corner of the kitchen,*" those were the sort of words that started flying between us.

The fact of *their* being found in the kitchen signified that one had to be vigilant about that day's food.

The dorm mother seemingly noticed this foolishness quickly and utilized her eloquence to keep the children in check, but once she went with casual assertions such as "*today it's just like you love it, yeah, there's no carrots,*" instantly the guerrilla gang of the low-aged began carrying out actions of indisputable political overtones such as stealing all the carrots that should not have laid concealed in the kitchen.

...and that was the story as I spoke it, but partway through Grandfather made a fed-up face and waved his hand. The story stopped partway through.

"...for having a fear of strangers you came up with a really shameless personality, that's what."

That was when I wished he would say *grew up*.

"Going back to the topic, as long as I at least raise a toy flag the funness will increase, is that correct?"

"No way it won't increase."

"I see... I will attempt it."

A flag. I could procure that sort of item easily.

After dinner, I casually made one with a stick and a piece of cloth.

The design on the flag... in short the choice of country, that was what I racked my brains about.

Though I declared it a country flag, there are things on which one can draw by hand and things one can't.

I borrowed an encyclopedia from Grandfather, and as I was choosing the country flag's design, I found that the flags of Indonesia and Libya seemed simple. The flag of Libya was just blocks of a single color, so I could draw it by hand.

Conversely, it did not seem likely I could replicate even slightly complex patterns such as those of San Marino's by drawing.

It appeared important that the design be enjoyable.

I did think it would have been good to have the drawing of an animal such as in Sri Lanka's, but at the end of my brain racking, I decided the most fun country flag of the Old Century was... the Seychelles.

It is just, well, it really felt like it was spreading. It went wide.

The next day, I took my finished flag and headed to install it in the mountain of trash.

The ants' labor was an amazing thing, as the konpeitos from yesterday had been brought away without a single left. This trap came to be a complete misfire.

Now then, this was going to be a replica of the same contraption, a remake in order to attract guests, but was it possible that social insects such as ants would not remember the location of a trap?

I changed the location, re-burying the container once more. Next to it I put the flag, and it was done.

Now then.

As it was tiresome to come back even once, I believed I would stay and supervise for today. Preparations were in place with no negligence.

I put some distance between myself and the thing and set out a picnic seat.

And the rest of the things I brought with. Lunch / canteen / teacakes and a loaned book, hat pencil and sketchbook, antique binoculars. Only the binoculars were borrowed from Grandfather.

A magnificent Spring's weather was not a bad encouragement for full-on field work, I could say. As I had a sketchbook and a novel, I could be on the lookout for half a day.

I quickly slapped up my cheeks, and willpower was sufficient.

"Whopsie."

I laid on my belly and held my head up with both elbows, setting up the binoculars.

The awakening was quite pleasant.

At some point I went to sleep like a log, my back bathed by the sunlight dimmed by sparse clouds.

"Curses..."

My schedule of fieldwork with occasional picnic had suddenly fallen apart.

It appeared that several hours had already passed. The flow of time is always gentle and cruel, I must say. Happily the sun was still shining, but as it had to come to cross over noon, I could expect no postponement of the sky scorching from the evening.

Also, my binoculars were not there. As this was no trifle I grew panicked. I searched around myself, searched like a spider circles around, and finally discovering them at my ankles I exhaled a sigh of relief. Complex machines such as these are precious items these days, and once lost, they were nearly impossible to regain.

Now then, how had the trap gone, to ask?

With unserious feelings I peeked in using the binoculars, and I came to perfectly see a large number of *them* swarming around the trap, chatting.

"....."

I rubbed up the interior side of my eyes with my fingers once, clearing away the possibility that this was an optical illusion.

Binoculars, once more.

There was not even the chance of being wrong. *They* were definitely there.

All of them were nibbling wholeheartedly on a kompeito they had in hand.

"But really, so easy, what to say."

I did not know what I had to be doing, as the thing had been too easy.

I absolutely must greet *them*, but will *they* not simply run away all as one if I just show up like this?

How should I start talking to *them*?

I must address *them*. I am a Mediator, if I do not take direct contact with *them* I would not be doing my job. I have laid a trap and brought lunch to come out in the field, but I had a perfect lapse of memory when it came to solve the problem of First Contact.

No, first thing before that was—

From my muddled thoughts I succeeded in first of all extracting the choice of measurement.

...

.....

.....

Measurement complete. Incredibly, they totaled seventy-one.

Right now, lured by the sorcery of sugary sweets, one staggered nearby. Seventy-two.

They all looked similar to each other.

Extremely short physically, and a thick overcoat with a single human-sized button on it.

Large heads on which rode triangular hats.
Teensy gloves and boots.
Outfits that looked like the traditional outfits of a foreign country.
Their figures were short, but of all colors.
Red, blue, green and yellow, orange, purple, viridian.
Accessories were diverse.
A crown bent aside, the cap of a pen, an origami helmet, the shell of an egg... all sorts of things, worn one each. And sort of proudly.
All of them left the impression of mischievous young boys.
Average height was ten centimeters.
Who are *they*, you ask?
That is correct—
Those tiny little things—

Were indeed the humanity of this Earth, at this point.

It was in truth not certain when fairies had been positively spotted for the first time. It seemed that reported cases of witnesses were already plentiful around the middle of the twenty-first century, but the details from before then had, sad to say, sunk into a metaphysical space alongside electronic information networks. Well, it is not like I am sad about it. There existed no things as scarce in veracity as information from the electronic information age. It seemed that salvaging it was a thriving affair for a time, but as it was an altogether fruitless effort, right now it was a field nobody even glanced at. Nobody touch informational linguistics. I would rather prefer the records of a generation without electronic information. Those were important.

That is because the existence of fairies has been alluded to in forms such as images and legends.

Ahhh, what a marvelous medium, paper. Its beauty was understandable and its sincerity true and it was honest and not greedy either, and most important of all there was nothing to say but how intellectual it was, though I wish there existed paper that did not deteriorate after thousands of years of time had lapsed... to quote the words of my friend Y, who had chosen the path of what is likely to be humanity's last researcher.

Anyway, little by little fairies began being witnessed, and then... many things happened, things that did not remain in the records, but that were the result of us, who were living right then, having them thrust before us.

In other words, as us people have withdrawn from the throne of humanity of Earth, we have surrendered that position to them, the *faeries*.

The United Nations Mediators Committee was established with the goal of reducing friction between the retired humanity and them, the fairies, and as an organization it was, in present days, nearly done with that role.

Consequently, in any case in which 'humanity' is written down, it is to indicate the fairies.

We should be called... the *former* humanity, or simply *people*, that is all. We do not mind even if you use *homo sapiens*.

As fairies have been excluded from categorization under the biological sciences (we did not even understand whether they were living beings or not) naming them would have been redundant, as there are no other words that can indicate the same thing.

In particular, only the term "humanity" shifted them into a special case, so it became what

implied the fairies... so long as you can understand this, there should be nothing complicated. This was already a period of decline in which mankind had lost its 'kind' and had become a mere people.

In these last few centuries the population had unhurriedly decreased, and at present it was disappearing.

Scientific skills were also being lost.

The cities were abandoned, and the areas in which we live have also reduced.

And so we left the Earth to the fairies.

They possessed the strength to live free even in this land that had fallen into ruin. It is just that we did not know the specifics of how. Though we could communicate with them with words, conversations rarely happened. It was perhaps possible that something that happened in the distant past had created a distance between our two races. At this point, its figure is that of a truth that we have no way of knowing.

Now then.

As a Mediator, I needed to become accustomed to them.

Mediators are they who, in order to deal with the problems of people and fairies, inserted themselves in the spaces between.

To say what was the usual, what was sought is an intimate conversation with the local residents.

Making preparations beforehand for that meant that the job would be smooth in the future.

Elegant woman always carried out their job with skillfulness and elegance.

Maximum results with minimum efforts. The instant it was carried out, that would become evidence of competence, and become their pride and self-respect... this is, in other words, an act that falls under that category.

Whatever else, I needed to deepen my friendship with those ultra-fairy-tale creatures.

Waiting for the right timing, I lowered myself and drew near at a half-run.

That was the first time I realized,

how the tension had made my limbs all stiff, it did.

Forcibly starting to run right after sitting seiza, well... there was that indescribable distrust that visited me when I could not control my own self. As predictable, I tipped forwards. Oh dear oh my how quickly the ground was approaching hoh hoh hoh. My body always served me so faithfully. But truly, every single just every single time, when matters come to a point it embarrassed me...

The ground was drawing close at a high speed.

Impact.

As my height was pointlessly tall, my tumble was also spectacular indeed.

"OwChCh..."

I must not waste even a single further day and become an adult woman with no carelessness to her, that is what I immediately and vigorously thought every time I tumbled.

More importantly, the fairies. I lifted my head while pinning down my nose. As I did, and as expectable, they had pupils open wide in the shapes of ginkgo nuts, steadily gazing at nothing else but me.

"Ah, uhm, well..."

Words did not come out well.

Haste breeds misjudgment.

Of all things, I went and stood up straight.

From a world of a mere few ten centimeter of stature my head, which several years ago made

a major breakthrough and right now was set at a terrifying height for a woman, would be certainly seen as protruding like a bwosh of a tidal wave.
And they, all as one,

"PIIIIIIIIIIIII?!!!"

A large chorus of screams so shrill they could shatter glass.
Scattering pell-mell like baby spiders did was exactly what this looked like.
They ran away in every direction.

Aw, they were really quick.

These fairies, which did not fly in the sky, were beings that, as far as the distinctions made in traditional fairy-tales, were less "fairies" and closer to Koro-koppur, but also, to say it, they far surpassed people in agility.

"Well! Excuse me! Wait... please..."

Even as I talked to them I understood. They would not wait. When things were like this, that was the norm.

I believe I too, in their position, would certainly not wait.

"....."

The hand I had extended fell feebly.

Instantly my mood shifted to feeling older by a decade.

"What a tragedy, to be worried from the beginning that this would be the end... now I have to redo the trap I'd worked so hard to lay, and change its place."

I walked like an old woman towards the contraption, and peered into the container that was the trap itself.

"...well now."

They were hiding.

Three of them.

I had succumbed to temptation.

I could only succumb. Vehemently so.

Next thing I noticed, there were three fairies on my room's desk.

All of them were for some reason sitting seiza.

And also shivering in fear.

That was not unreasonable.

Given how the instant I spotted them I sealed the container's opening with a hand and ran back home.

No, more than succumbing to temptation, I may instead say that I have utterly taken them captive.

Would this be describable as a serious xenogeneic problem?

In principle, it was the norm for Mediators to not interfere in fairy societies.

I must conceal the present situation... no, I wanted to actually strive to solve it.

"Uhm, guys...?"

Addressed, the three fairies shuddered with a start like they were announced the death penalty.

They were utterly dominated by fear. How sad.

...well, this was my fault, however, and all the way, indeed.

Still, now what should I do, for one.

It will simply not do to keep them under house arrest like this.

"I apologize, I did not mean to do this, things just ended up like this."

The three looked up at me with moist eyes.

Ahhh, what adorable and innocent eyes.

My switch nearly got flipped to the on position.

"Lessee, would you like anything to eat? Or maybe—" I attempted to calm things down via a joke that well expressed *esprit*. "Do you want me to watch me relish as I eat all of you?"

"—————!!!?!"

The three went incontinent in sequence.

"...I apologize. For an instant even I thought I was being indiscreet, but... I apologize. I mean it, I said I am sorry. I will not eat you. As if."

I somehow pacified the three as they curled themselves up in despair.

By the way, it appears that fairies excreted almost fresh water.

That being said, I was not thinking of drinking it.

Regaining my presence of mind, I tried a different approach in order to tame these wild animals into eating from my hand.

Even better, fairies like sugary sweets.

I wish I had done this from the start.

"These are just leftovers, still, do you want some?"

I put a konpeito on my fingers and offered it.

The three looked at each other with faces on the point of tears, and a representative among them stood up and approached the offered finger.

It stopped at a distance of around twenty centimeters, looked firmly at what I was doing, and, seeing no sign of hostility, he at last accepted it.

All right.

This drop was truly a little drop, but it would be so nice if it became an important drop for humanity both new and past.

"Well, go on."

Fearfully fearfully, he put his mouth to it.

Vigilant about me with the near totality of his consciousness, in the beginning he appeared to not even be able to tell its flavor, but gradually the ratio of the Deliciousness Gauge appeared to increase.

By the time he had eaten the one drop, vigilance had disappeared and he began looking relaxed somehow.

"...it is tremendously simple to get your species to eat from our hands, right, you three?"

Seeing things as they were, the two behind whispered a conversation, and so I rolled a drop towards them too.

It was eaten so promptly it was like it had been inhaled.

With a somewhat fidgety attitude, the three glanced in my way.

With eyes that were somewhat shining with gluttony.

I quickly understood what they were trying to mean.

"...that is quite all right."

Today it shall be a most magnificent feast.

I overturned the bottle, dumping its contents.

"Come now, have to eat until you are full."

The three were all smiles from joy as they dove into the mountains of sweets.
That was the beginning of a mad banquet.
Ten minutes later—

Yay! Yay!♪

They were frolicking about in joy.
They were playing innocently.
It looked like their will to play around came out when their bellies were full.
They jumped in and they jumped out of the empty bottle and filled it, all innocently. Like kittens.
I was sitting firmly down on my chair and sketching them without words.
Though if any remained I would have wanted one or two, the sweets had completely disappeared, but what are you saying, thinking this as a 'sweetener' of a bribe it was quite cheap.
"I am barely a novice and I already ended up with a good command of bribery..."
That was the deed of a competent Mediator.
Regardless, sketching four fairies is quite the complicated endeavor, if there had been only three, then,

.....



"You have not increased, have you?"

The fairies stopped their motions on the dot and stared at me.

One, two, three, four... there were definitely four.

But when I brought them in I believe there were three, however.

As I wrinkled up my eyebrows, one of the fairies walked near.

"Uhm," he went with a voice narrow like a reed pipe, "are you humans God? Are you?"

"...God?"

"God."

Well now.

I had no memories of having become a god, however.

So are us former humanity beings equal to gods to these fairies?

"I do not believe I am God, if I may say."

As I said that the four made a circle and began consultations. The representative one stepped forwards,

"But still, you are very... big?"

"From where you people are looking, that is certainly true. But I am not God."

"You humans, you humans..." he seemed to be searching for words to convey something.

However, he didn't find them. This was awkward. His feelings showed in his motions, "awww!"

They are really cute indeed, these small type humans.

"I believe you should think like this. You fairies are the humanity right now," next I pointed at me, "and us humans are the humanity of the past."

"The humanity of the past..."

"We have now retired. This is us resigning. In the distant past we burned so bright we fought as was our style, but we are now really peaceful beings."

Circle formation. Whispering. Uncaring I talked to them above that.

"And so, you should not be so afraid of us, you see."

Psst psst psst psst.

"How about that, did you understand what I said?"

Psst psst psst psst psst psst psst psst psst psst psst.

"...uhm, hello?"

"Master human!"

The huddle broke up and one of them came forwards, his hand risen.

"What is it?"

The representative thrust his fingertip without words.

And still in that stance he closed his eyes tight.

It was like he was waiting for something.

"?"

I was completely clueless as to what this meant.

But, for now, I also extended a finger and poked his.

I remembered an old movie where there was a scene like this.

As for what the result was,

"Waaah." "Ohhh." "Mhhh." "Ahhh."

There were quite impressed, were they.

Was this something like their own kind of shaking hands, perhaps? That would be nice if it were.

"Well then, now that we have become acquainted, you wish to return to the mountain of garbage, right? I forcibly took them away from there, did I?"

"The mountain of garbage?"
 "The place where you were!"
 "We're going back to the mountain of garbage?"
 "Exactly. That is the place where you people live, correct?"
 The four tilted their heads at the same angle and at the same time. The answer that came perfectly overlapped was,
 "....."Who knows?"....."
 "You do not know about the place where you were born?!"
 "Been... born...?"
 I felt like I had pressed the Bizarre switch.
 The four once again made a circle.
 "Master human, we have one more question about this."
 "Y-, yes, go on."
 "When was I born?"
 "I do not know."
 "Really."
 "Why are you asking me that...?"
 "Who knows?"
 Not pressing the matter appeared best.
 "Before that, could you kindly tell me your names?"
 "....."....."
 Four people's worth received my gaze in silence.
 "The name, you know, the name. I would be happy if you could make your self-introduction."
 "The... name...?" "Nah-me, she said nah-me." "Nah-me is just German for name." "Will the pen name do?"
 "It will."
 "... the speaker sunk into thought for a moment. "...now that I really think about it, I don't have one."
 "I see."
 I got used to them a little.
 "I get it, us, we have no names!"
 "Is that not inconvenient?"
 "It might be!"
 "How do you manage among your friends, normally?"
 The four's jaws were slack as they half-opened their mouths while thinking. The conclusion that came was...
 "....."...with nuances!"....."
 "I see~."
 Peace in the heart banzai.
 "But from where I'm looking you are all without name, it is a little bit inconvenient."
 "Let's see!" "We apologize!" "Can we apologize?" "Will you relish eating us?"
 "No, I will not eat you."
 "But why!" "Did we narrowly escape death?" "Was it better if we weren't ready for it?" "Are we going to become your flesh and blood, master human?"
 "...I said I will not eat you."
 Seeing the fairies making another circle, I had one thing that I remembered.
 Since we finally managed to approach each other, I required some technique to recognize

them individually. Something like numbering them, what they do to wild animals when they are subject to observation, anything.

As my counterparts were life forms equal (perhaps superior) in intelligence, it could not be arbitrary. Something you would do to experimental subjects like assigning them nametags would have not done.

Therefore, there was in practice only one way.

"Guys, your attention please," their sights gathered, "I wish to be good friends with all you fairies from here on out. And so, let me present you all with names."

The fairies lost it.

"That's silly!" "That's what you want to do?" "You the big winner at life or something?" "I'd rather be eaten!"

"Then I will eat you."

""""—?!""""

One of them went incontinent, then the other three were infected and went incontinent as well, indeed, this was just their species.

Would they perhaps be connected even mentally in some part I could not see?

"I am joking."

"It was a joke!" "It was!" "Good thin!" "Master human is making fun of us!"

"How cute you are, all of you."

I decided to promptly christen them.

Fairies have little of distinctive in their outward looks, but their clothes had each subtle differences.

"That is right... then, let us go with the first nickname."

A tiny finger was pointed,

"If you please."

"Uhhmm... you sort of look like the leader, Cap-san."

"Capp'."

"Please keep that fixation you seem to have with your hat, all right."

"That suggestion makes my heart throb."

"So, you."

Next was the second fairy.

"Yes!"

"You sort of leave me the impression of being of Japanese descent, so, Nakata-san."

"Sooo, that is what came out..."

"Please fight twenty-four hours a day while wearing a suit, glasses, and a camera."

"I am simply opposed!"

"Now then, the third is..."

The third one raised his hand partway through and interrupted my words.

"...master human, I have a proposal!"

Well now?

"Now what is it?"

"I want to decide my own name for myself, can I?"

"Well now, you want to give me your name, does that mean you have one?"

The fairy bobbed his head twice in a nod.

"Of course it is fine, if I may say. What name would you have?"

"Sir Christopher McFarlane."

"...even with the title 'sir'..."

"Love it! Love it!"

He loves it, it seems. I see.

"May I?"

"You may. I do not mind. It is a wonderful name."

"I will do my best~!"

"I-, it is my turn, is it? Is it about time for mine, is it?"

The fourth fairy raised both hands, seemingly unable to keep waiting.

"Well then, you are..."

"What if I tried giving my self a name?"

"You too, then. It is fine. What name would it be?"

"Chikuwa!"

"A fish paste cake shaped like a tube, then. I so would like to eat one..."

"Is that wrong?"

"In a sense."

"Well then~!"

Mr. Chikuwa (temporary name) glanced at Mr. McFarlane.

"Sir Chikuwa."

"Food cannot be an aristocrat."

"Really~!"

Truth is it could, however.

But if I brought up *sirloin* at this point the discussion would become a bit complicated, so I decided on Chikuwa-san.

And thus, the four fairies and I became friends.

If I had them act as contacts, I should be able to easily reach the other fairies as well.

As far as beginnings for a Mediator, this was not bad, I believed?

"Come now, we should return to the mountain soon."

"Yes!" "es!" "Too!" "We are going back!"

"So, how come you're suddenly all frantic, seriously?"

Night, home, dinner table.

With the World Names Dictionary - from Grandfather's personal collection - in one hand, I had my pen run on the sketchbook as I answered Grandfather.

"I gave names to four fairies I came to know, and we got along, all well and good, but..."

"Let me guess, you were asked to give names to the rest of their guys, is that it."

He arrived at the correct answer just with a glance to the names listed on the sketchbook.

"...indeed. Must say, they are a far more friendly species than I thought."

"They have always really liked humans."

"I have learned that with my skin."

"Things get really complicated on that regard, right... well, I think there's documents on that regard, so you should just check them out yourself."

He pointed at the cabinet.

"I do have memories of interacting with them normally when I was a child, but... I was not dealing with them like this."

"That's because children are themselves fairies. As growth takes hold, memories become vague. Yeah, it's like a veil gets laid on them. And on the other side of that veil, at times, a

world tinged with magic lies hidden. It's so romantic."

"...whaaa~, but I'm sure~, you were Your Excellency the Great Former Researcher And Now Teacher, no~?"

"What, are you making fun of me? The occult is also a side of the truth, you know? It's been rehabilitated as a branch of learning in countless occasions in history. First of all, as far as the point of whether fairies really exist, we don't know the truth, and so..."

"For an instant I felt you were acting like a senile old person."

"I'm gonna live longer than you do, you know."

"...well, being nice enough to live longer is a good thing, however please do so in moderation, all right?"

"It feels like I was told to go off and die instead."

"Sigh, at last I came up with fifty."

Thinking up good names was hard.

"Still, getting this familiar with them this easily means you're doing a really good job."

"S-, so I am."

We shall keep the suspicions of kidnapping to ourselves.

"Which means that they're gathering around that mountain of trash again, huh."

"So it appears. I want to go see how things are again tomorrow, however."

"Mh-hm. Then... steady your resolve."

I stopped the pen.

"...which means?"

"There are shockingly few things that we know about these beings known as fairies."

Grandfather's speech was tinged with that peculiar implication of honesty typical of those who toy with the truth.

"Where they're born from, how their life works... it's almost all unknown. If I'm to say what we know, it's that their number is large, that they have a high level of intelligence and skills, that they don't need food to live, and that they're a different species from all previously known living beings, that's about it."

Grandfather's words connected like an express parcel delivery to the memories of the lectures I had at The School of my chosen field, Neo-Anthropology. Neo-Anthropology is the fairy field of anthropology. To simplify, it's talking about the fairies.

There are definitely many things about the fairies that are a mystery.

But have those mysteries not been solved not even once?

The answer is said to have been a big no.

But at the very least, have we not solved their mysteries to at least some extent once?

When the lands above ground were still in majority the world of the Former Humanity, when science and wisdom filled the electronic information networks and the textbooks of the schools of the cities, that should definitely have been possible.

That information had been lost.

Us Former Humanity have been caught in between Information Discontinuities many times in history.

For example, we do not know a conclusive reason why humanity decided to withdraw. The only thing handed down was simply that, far in the past, it was decided to be so.

Data about that might be sleeping somewhere, perhaps.

But to produce it, once again, required a passion in bringing truth to light, which now no longer existed in us.

We had declined.

How did fairies breed?

Why did they not need food?

What was the reason why they use the same words as us?

What lied at the base of their high technology level?

As the truth was buried by the passing of time, even the fairies, who do not have a custom of recording things down, had not learned it.

We were merely living on.

As if to say that that was good enough for us.

What Grandfather was saying, too, continued in the shape of retracing all that in a more specialistic way.

"...and from that point, to be extremely concise, it seems there's a tendency to assert that the fairies are in truth magical beings. Guess we could call it mere romanticism, to put it in other words."

"A conclusion that appears to have come from being too tired to investigate."

"Like there's anything we can do 'bout it. Where should science start with an intelligent life form that might well increase by subdivision, no one knows that."

"Subdivision..." I very much had an idea about what that meant.

"There's also a theory that says they don't need food to live."

"But they did eat sweets, you know?"

"For the taste, not for nourishment, mind. However, the fact of whether they support their societies with farming or hunting is still unconfirmed. According to folklore, we have it that fairies are able to live just on the essence of things."

"The essence of things..."

"Lemme explain. Think of it as a step necessary for the breeding of fairies, how about?

Mayflies in the imago stage, after shedding and becoming adults, don't have meals, same thing."

"Ahhh, if so then it is plausible, indeed."

"If they don't need to make any particular effort in order to live, then I suppose we could explain their massive intelligence and vitality. Same thing with reproduction, they're like creatures cast off from the yoke of living beings. It's possible that there's a radical difference with them and the humanity that, no matter how far they progress their culture, remains made of living beings until the end."

"You have thought about this quite thoroughly."

"This doesn't even figure as thinking, you know. The true quest is a far more profound thing."

"....."

I could not match Grandfather on the aspect of knowledge.

As someone who did have an academic record I could not help feel a slight envy in my breast, so there I went, acting the adult and scattering that away with a shrug, then returning once again to the work of listing.

"Still, you really got thick eyebrows."

The tip of the pen was stabbed into the sketchbook.

"...you know I will not care for you when you are sick and dying?"

"I told you that I'm going to live longer than you."

Grandfather was about to return to the kitchen, but he turned back and said this.

"Ah, right, I forgot to say something."

"Yes?"

"You should think about dealing with fairies when they're alone and when they're in a group as

completely different things. When they swarm they are a massive smelting furnace of culture and science. That will sublimate at the slightest bump, and new culture will be transmitted in an instant. And at a speed that is definitely not controllable by people."

I stopped my hands and lifted my face. Grandfather's words continued.

"To say it simply, when many fairies gather they really get started on doing fun things, that's that. They mobilize intelligence and resources and efficiency and passion far beyond humans."

"What could happen, concretely speaking?"

"No idea. Anything could plausibly happen. I've no clue as to what's popular among them. How about you just take the plunge as a Mediator?"

"...Grandfather, you are my predecessor, so please... guidance of that level of irresponsibility, really..."

Ignoring my complaint, Grandfather asserted this.

"Oh, that's right. If you're going, you should bring that dictionary with."

"Even though it is quite heavy?"

"I just think it's better if you bring it, I do."

Grandfather smiled with a tone of voice that seemed insinuating.

"All right...?"

The next day. I once again visited the mountain of garbage.

"Eh...?"

The mountain of garbage had vanished.

There was a metropolis.

Specifically, in the style of science-fiction futurism.

That said, in miniature size.

The miniature of a city still had a fair bit of width.

The mountain of garbage that I could just barely look over, which had been there previously, had now been exchanged for a miniature skyscraper with its exact same perimeter.

The high rise buildings had all a retro-futuristic design.

Countless transparent tubes connected the buildings, and inside, futuristic cars were going back and forth.

A large crowd of fairies was moving about paved roads, looking busy.

In the center of the city there soared a building that ought be called the Central Tower, and on its top there waved a handmade flag lifted via a konpeito dispenser.

This was just as Grandfather said it would be.

When a number of fairies gathered, amazing things happened.

And despite that, seriously!

"...this is going too far."

The advanced development of science was nearly impossible to tell apart from magic, but I also realized this could not be distinguished from a joke.

My attempt to approach this massive city in extremely small size gave me the viewpoint of a kaijuu invading the city with stomping feet, rather than not.

Instantly the fairies inferred my presence.

The alarm blared, 'warning! Warning!'

"Well now?"

The motions of the fairies throughout the city grew more frantic all at once.

I could not tell whether they were afraid or simply hurrying, however.

I advanced until some square, and there I stood still.

"Now then..."

A biplane flew at an altitude of around fifty centimeters overhead.

Unlike a real biplane it didn't really attack, however, it just persistently continued to make rounds. It was as if it was directing the panic going on at ground level.

A crowd of fairies began encircling me at a distance as I stood stock still.

There was a fear of some level, it seemed, as they did not approach past a fixed distance. As a result a round gap was created around me, and from that place where nothing should be, a peculiar mental strain flowed in.

Tiny as they may be, gathering this many sights made me a little mentally strained.

The fairies were known for their impressive disposition to forgetfulness.

For example, they tended to be unaware of being in control of things. And so they never change their lifestyle which has them live while avoiding people's gazes, and occasionally they have been observed to feel fear and reverence, at times affection, towards the humans attempting to contact them, which makes them act as sort of the servants in the master/servant relationship.

"Uhm~... good morning."

Bustle bustle bustle.

There was a response, but it was not of clear words.

"Erm, now, the four fairies that I took here yesterday, are they here?"

This time there was a slightly bigger response than a moment ago. That said, no conversation came to happen.

Bustle bustle bustle bustle.

I could not get rid of this fairly awkward mood. As I should have expected, to deal with them, friendship at an individual level came inevitably required.

"Uhm~"

It happened then.

One of the buildings on my right split through the middle and slid apart to the sides. Standing by on alert within the building was a robot.

"???"

It had a design that came straight out of an anime for children.

From how it was taking a fighting pose I imagined it was the city's defense mechanism.

And there I ended up, standing face to face with that.

Now that I look closer, inside the half-transparent dome in the head I saw a single fairy riding it. The pilot?

I heard this voice, or was it a sound, from the megaphone it had installed.

"ZAAAH!"

"..."

Taken aback inside, I could not quite respond to that.

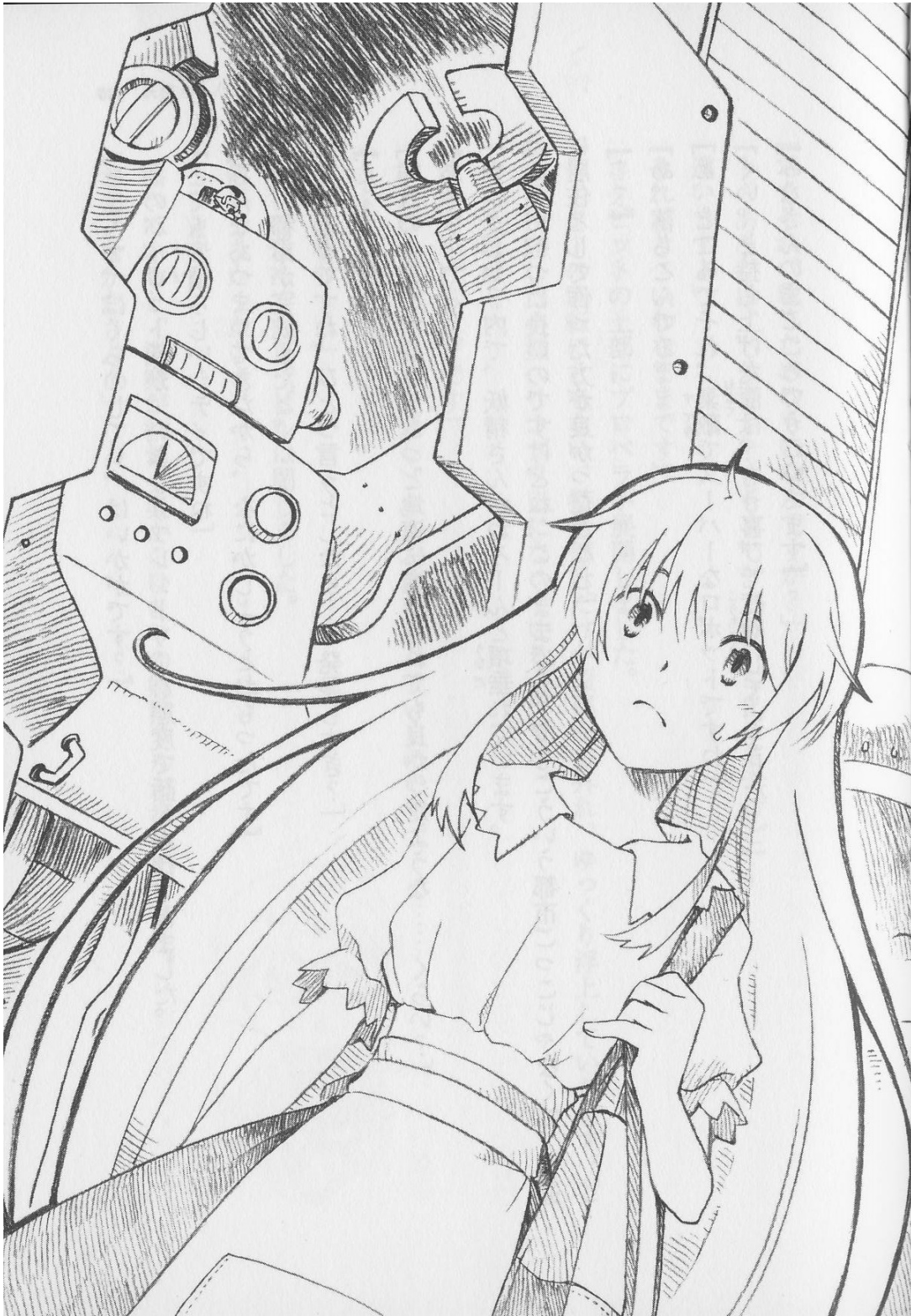
Perhaps hesitant from how there was no response, with a somewhat feebler intonation it went,

"Zah?"

"Is that a question?"

"...Who knows?"

What mysterious creatures.



"By the way, how are you finding our city?"

Mister pilot there suddenly talked to me with a friendly attitude.

"It is quite a magnificent city indeed."

"We thought, since everybody gathered we had to do something."

And that was where the city was created, he meant.

"But, you know, if I have to say one thing... it is too developed?"

"Wha...?"

"Because it was created yesterday and there it is today, I mean. Sort of, I wish you had followed a much more gradual development... something like that?"

"Awww..."

Inside the cockpit, the fairy's head drooped with a *nero~n*.

"Let me say, it is pretty good, however, even left like this. I simply suppose that I wished that you had built normal dwellings instead of playing at making a big city, that is what I mean."

"..."

Ah, he got depressed.

"B-, by the way, that is a marvelous Super Robot, indeed."

Twitch, he raised his head and on its surface was now the blush of happiness.

"It moves thanks to everybody's hearts!"

"But that thing, is it built for fighting?"

"...are you an enemy? If you are an enemy, then it will be a big problem, though!"

"I am not."

"Then we can stay in peace!"

A propeller unfolded out from the top of the cockpit.

With the revolving of that rotor just the cockpit part came off from the head, unhurriedly floating upwards. It appears it became an independent small-sized helicopter.

"A-, and that is?"

"I believe it's called flying!"

Returning me an answer that wasn't an answer, it went floating softly.

"Goodbye now!"

"Goodbye..."

The copter flew away, the building closed.

Like nothing had happened.

"...well now..."

While I was at a loss, the swarm split open, and one of the fairies walked in from the back.

"My, but it is you, Nakata-san?"

It was the fairy of Japanese descent(?) that I had named yesterday.

He seemed to be embracing that image, because today he was wearing a gray suit, a camera hung from his head, and he had eyeglasses.



"Good morning. What happened to the other three?"

"They have surrendered."

"...to what?"

"Who knows?"

What a rampaging lifestyle.

With the conversation between Mr. Nakata and I before their eyes, a commotion spread among the population.

"Are you talking to the human?" "You're talking all nice and confidently?" "Aren't you talking to much?" "Taw-king, that there is, taw-king!" "What's this all about!"

"Uhm, and so, about the matter of the name..."

Mr. Nakata tilted his head.

"Did you say name?"

"...did you forget?"

Just when I had gone and listed out names for seventy-one of them.

"Come now, yesterday, when I sent you off, you spoke of how everybody wanted a name, right? Well, I came to give names to those friends of yours... you do not remember?"

"Feels like it happened, feels like it maybe didn't."

"It happened."

"Feels like it didn't happen, feels like it maybe did."

"I said that it happened."

"Feels like it happened, feels like it maybe did."

"You people really need to jot down memos to remember things."

"Memories are all a big mess and swaying about very hard."

I wished for them not to sway.

"I understand. That is enough. Regardless, I will be giving names to everybody, so if you could start forming a line..."

And there I realized.

Now that I look close, the population seemed to be fully filling the square and the streets... it did not matter how I looked at this, there were over several thousand of them.

"...dear me?"

They had increased.

The list I prepared had a mere seventy-five names.

"I see... the fairies from all the region went and gathered..."

"Lemme in on it!" "What're you doing?" "We're playing city!" "There's a human!" "What's happening?" "What're you going to do?" "We got names!" "Names, huh!"

And even now I saw them as steadily increasing even further.

"Wha-, stop! Please do not line up! Abort, abort!"

This was not quite a level of population that I could handle alone.

I waved my hands hard and tried to scatter the queue, but it was already too late. A very long queue, behind which stood an even longer queue, had its starting point in the square and extended far in the distance. Also, fairies with an armband that said *staff* were already standing around, guiding the queue, distributing numbered tickets, making some sit down, and also making some stand up, and once I saw what a magnificent organization the queue had, I realized that I had stepped into a domain from which there was no withdrawing.

"...oh dear dear dear?"

This was strange. Some part of this was strange. Something was strange.

A little experiment begun with a single bottle of konpeitos had developed into this ludicrous situation.

The sensation of my stomach contracting, which was exactly what the person responsible for making trouble for this large crowd ought taste, made me wipe sweat I did not even have.

Sigh, this was not a promise I should have made lightly.

If I were to run away from here, I could utterly forget about building a friendly relationship with the fairies. It was possible they would forget everything about this, but the choice of betraying several thousands of them at once required more courage than imaginable.

A bottle of konpeitos. A pinch of slothfulness. A pinch of ambition:

with the cost only that, I had encouraged them to waste preposterous amounts of energy and technology. If this came after one night, what is going to happen tomorrow? Could this wave expand to the whole world, ending up leaving deep scars on fairy society?

...this was bad.

Cold sweat poured down in quantities enough to sell as my reasoning abilities escaped into the intra-cerebral flower field (the one rumored to be quite pleasant to be in), abilities which I drew back with my whole willpower.

"First time with this!" "Name, huh!" "Will you give me one?" "Now that you say it, it's nice to have names!" "They're convenient!" "Why didn't we have any so far?" "Who knows!" "I just don't get it!" "We didn't think of it!" "It was a blind spot!"

The population was raising the roof.

Mr. Nakata clambered up to my shoulder and began talking to me.

"Will you? Give a name to everybody?"

"....."

After a long silence, I made a single decision.

"Will you name us!"

"...of course, I will, that is what I am trying to do."

I will do this with penitence only within my heart. As I think it perhaps insufficient, but you do not mind even if I paid it back in installments, do you, actual God?

I beckoned over one of the staff fairies and requested him for the queue not to go far in the distance, but to press into the square.

"Aye sah!"

It was willingly received.

I saw the faeries as being wild and unruly, but it seemed that when they got into the mind,

they could move in perfect order. It took less than three minutes for the queue to wind around into a spiral, compressing into the square.

All the fairies had massed within the reach of my eyes.

Now was the chance. The one and only. To leave all these inconveniences undetermined.

Indeed, though the fairies were shrouded in mystery, there were several things that were known. I did have a fair bit of thirst for knowledge, and to quench that, at The School we had a more than vast enough book collection as well as a nosy team of teachers that numbered higher than the students. Being not very good at interpersonal relationships, I utilized the time I had in abundance to read extensively, and for the team of teachers I did not miss a single one in my pathological desire to be taught. Within this head there were over ten years of almost pointlessly miscellaneous knowledge, soaring to the skies like a spire.

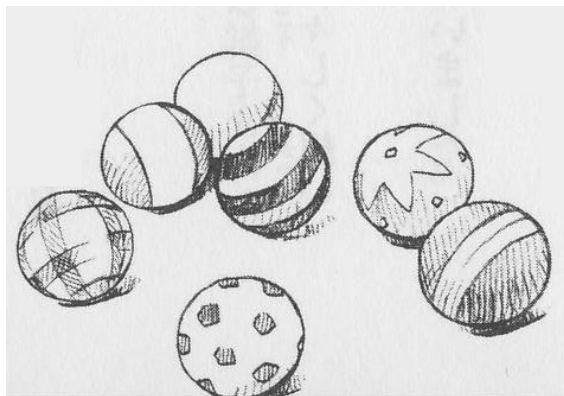
For example, one point of data present there was that they were susceptible to plosive sounds.

I spread my hands wide, then closed them with good force.

Smack.

A perfect silence fell on the square.

The fairies, the source of the bustle, vanished without a single one remaining. Did they run away? No, they did not. They did not shift about or even take a single step. In the place where a queue had formed in the shape of a spiral there laid, in their stead, several thousand colorful spheres.



It was a truly surreal scene.

A gray sphere also tumbled down from my shoulder.

This is the behavior typical to fairies called *rounding up*.

When scared, they curled into spheres to protect themselves. And not just by holding their knees, they turned into actual balls. Same as pillbugs.

It is doubtful whether that would really protect them from dangerous animals, but this meant in other words that the danger had passed.

"I apologize, everyone. The promise is abandoned."

I had to run away now.

I took in hand the bag I had brought. That very heavy thing.

Heavy?

So it was. As told by Grandfather, I had brought the names dictionary. That thing which was bizarrely thick and heavy, so like a blunt weapon.

"....."

Grandfather's instructions now came back to me at last, and in the shape of me understanding them.

With a unsteady hand I lifted up the dictionary in both hands. The dictionary, offered up to the heavens, seemed to shine sublimely.

The fairies, released from their rounded up status, were sitting down dazedly here and there in the square. Perhaps they also slept in that shape, because there were some among them who were rubbing their eyes and yawning.

I suspect they have no more memories about the naming anymore.

Mr. Nakata waddled towards me.

"What is that?"

"This is a present."

"Hoh?"

Mr. Nakata's jet black pupils were clearly reflecting my figure as I held up the dictionary.

"You can pick the name you want from this dictionary of names."

Solemnly declaring that to the fairies, who were gathering up now that they had recovered from their rounding up, I set down the dictionary.

"Huh..."

The eyes of the fairies staring at me were moist with innocent, deep emotion. Within it, an ecstasy such that could be taken as somehow religious.

"Master human is God."

Mr. Nakata whispered that with shivering voice.

"So, how'd it go?"

Grandfather asked me that, the dinner table in between us.

"I may have given them the dictionary as present..."

He might have predicted this reply, as Grandfather only nodded with an / see, there was no particular criticism.

"Their urbanization has advanced amazingly. And in a single night."

"It's the synergism from the increase of population. When that happens the funness of the place increased, the fairies increase even further, and development speeds up even more... the rest is all snowballing."

I played around with a potato floating in the soup plate without carrying it to my mouth.

"Don't you like today's soup or something?"

"No, it is simply that there is something bothering me."

"Which is?"

"...there is just something caught in my mind, however, I do not quite understand what it is, concretely speaking."

Now just what it could be, this unease I have.

The source of the unease became clear when I visited the metropolis.

I saw it as unchanged from the day before, with only a single point of difference in one spot.

"What the—!"

It was a change I could not possibly overlook.

The building which stored the robot had been demolished, and in its stead, a massive figure adorned the city.

No, more than a figure... it was the statue of a goddess.

Indeed, it was the statue of a goddess.

It had my face.



"Now wait just a minute!"

I ended up as the symbol of the population.

"This is going to be a problem, really!"

The goddess that I was was lifting up the dictionary with both hands.

"Ahhh, it's God!"

Mr. Nakata showed up, and in sequence his friends also began showing themselves.

"God, God!" "God, 'mornin'!" "God came today too!" "Weee!"

I was treated like a god.

"I see, so that was what my unease was about..."

Fairies were easily excited and easily grew attached.

My nonchalant act was in a certain sense one of creation, and as a result, the concept of worship was born in their society.

What if this behavior were to snowball, and be transmitted to fairies all over the world?

In fairy history, I would become a ruler who acted as a god.

"...mh-hm."

To say it clearly, this was a problem.

If it had happened at an earlier time, this was going to be one big problem, indeed.

I looked down at Mr. Nakata, who was waving his arms hard. Suddenly I extended my hands, pik, and slickly put my finger to his forehead.

"...yes?"

"There, tag. You're God next."

"Eh?!"

His jaw dropped, and Mr. Nakata's countenance became one of astonishment.

"Eh? Me, God?"

"That is correct. After all, I did tag you."

"Incredible!"

"I was just God minus one, but no more."

"Minus one...?"

Mr. Nakata's glasses clouded up.

Staggering, he put his hand on my toes with a paf.

He looked me up from beneath his brows with a face that seemed to say *how 'bout that*, looking at what I was going to do.

"Sorry. The same person cannot become God again. Therefore even if you tag me it is pointless."

"It just cannot be helped, then?"

"No, not at all. Come, everyone, if you do not hurry and run away you will be made into a real God."

The fairies all around shuddered with a start.

"What are you going to do, Nakata-san? If you leave it like this, you will be God, you know?"

"Eh, ah, eh~..." he looked all around, then "DON'WANNA BE GOOOOOOOD!"

He rushed to his fellows.

The concept of god inverted and became that of devil.

On this point it matched the history of human legends, and might be quite amusing from a standpoint of the history of a people, might it not.

"Wah!" "God has come!" "God is coming, he is coming!" "Run run run away!" "God is infectious!" "This is a big problem!" "PIIIIIII!!!"

The fairies scattered about as they tried to run away.

"Waaa~iii~t uuu~p!"

Mr. Nakata chased them.

Tinged with a look of playing tag, amusingly called 'playing demon' in Japan, a game of scrubbing divine rights onto each other had begun.

"Quick as always."

The fairies ran around like squirrels when they became serious.

This game of 'playing demon' ('god'?) was quite hectic, and unfolded at a speed that I could not entirely follow with the eyes.

Although they did not fly in the air, they climbed the miniature buildings, dove into any hole they found, and generally ran around in all three dimensions, which made it quite the problem.

God being detested was certainly an odd thing, but humans too did something similar, indeed.

No, I was not saying that there was no problem, but...

Still, with this I should be able to avoid being caught as the kernel of religious concepts.

"PIIII!" "WuhPIII!" "FWAAAAH! "PLAYING AS!" "GOD!" "Who's god right now?!" "Tag, taaaa-ag!" "EeEEEEK!" "A hole, where's a hole?!"

It did not take ten minutes before all the fairies had vanished.

Here we had the finale, the downfall of a city-state.

Simultaneously, this also signified that my professional duties as Mediator had been reset.

"...well... it is still better than leaving behind a bad reputation, indeed..."

I once again examined the statue of the goddess.

"Hoh, so that's how it ended up."

"G-, Grandfather?"

Suddenly my back was slapped, and I emitted a muffled voice from my throat.

Grandfather had a grinning smile on him as he was standing behind me.

"I just came to see how things were, but... looks like there isn't a single one of them left, huh."
"But there were until a few moments ago, indeed..."
Grandfather, now standing at my side, made his gaze run without reservation on the statue of the goddess.
"It really resembles the giving of the Ten Commandments."
"From the Bible?"
"Yup. The scene of Moses breaking the stone tablets, I guess. Or maybe the scene where he receives the stone tablets from God."
"...that is becoming more and more religious, is it."
"Seems they've really gotten a liking for you, miss."
I spread my arms and announced this with sarcasm.
"But everybody has vanished now."
"No, even if you had let them be, this would have likely happened no matter what."
"...what?"
"They, the fairies, have a gathering/scattering disposition. When they gather, they can put together a city in one night, like they did here, but they quickly get tired of it and scatter around every which where."
"Leaving behind all this that they have built?"
"From their viewpoint, it's sort of a cheap and disposable manufacture, I'm guessing. This much is, at least."
Grandfather proudly laughed out loud.
"So this is how the current humanity do things."
"Well now, are we having fun..."
"Might be because I expected my granddaughter to come to neither big nor small things, but instead came back with quite the amusing event. Managing this much in few days, why, you look a lot better in my eyes now."
"....."
It was a way of praising me that did not make me happy, that.
"First of all, steady your resolve, I believe I told you that."
"You did tell me, but still..."
"To get along with their kind, an appropriate leniency is required, that's how it goes."
My back slapped again, I pitched forwards and grabbed the goddess statue to avoid falling.
The statue fell without hurry, and extremely easily shattered into scattered pieces.
Seeing that, Grandfather once again laughed loudly.
This old man seems to be far too happy, I must say.
I nearly felt strength fail from my knees.
Awww, if that was how it had to be...
"...I wish I had reigned as a goddess until the end."
And this was my first job as a Mediator, in all of its details.

Fairy memo - Gathering/Scattering Disposition

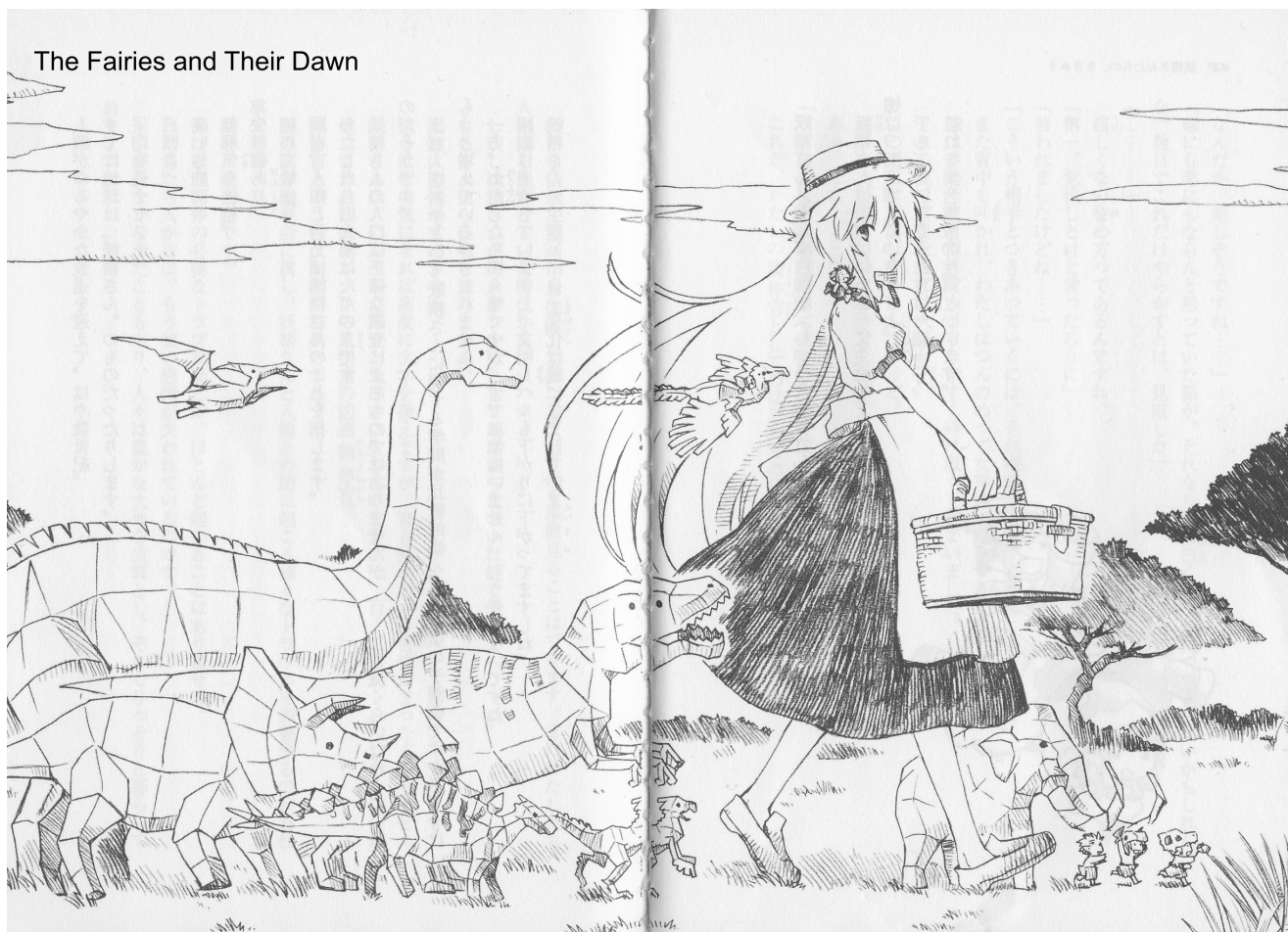
Fairies normally live all individually, but once they make a swarm, they increase in number explosively.

But the moment of their dispersal arrives in an instant.

This is called a Gathering/Scattering Disposition.



The Fairies and Their Dawn



Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now.
Earth was now the property of the Fairies.
Average height 10 centimeters.
Body to head ratio, three.
High intelligence.
Innocent disposition.
Habit of incontinence, present.
Extremely nimble and alert.
At present, when saying "humanity" one indicates the fairies.
We former humanity are mere men.
The population of fairies has not been subjected to investigation, but it appeared to be roughly in the ten to twenty billion.
That was an figure estimated when the field of Neo-Anthropology, the study of matters concerning fairies, was still relatively thriving, and at this moment they may have increased further.
For our own, us Former Humanity were already below the hundred million. It would not be long now.
Countries have disbanded, and the cultural level has lowered and lowered.
The abilities / origins / culture of the fairies were shrouded in mystery.
In folklore / folk tales / fairy tales, it was possible to catch a glimpse of their existence. It started from generations in which we were still influential.
Still, it was a mystery what caused the fairies take over the earth.
Of course, they themselves did not know.
No records remained, either.
When they got into the mood they could manage a high level civilization, but they did not have the custom of leaving behind written things.
The fairies now lived throughout Earth without doing anything in particular.
And then there was I, a UN Mediator in charge of Kusunoki Village.
A Mediator was an international government worker.
Affiliated with the UN Mediator Committee, our job was to reconcile any problems that could occur in the space between fairy and human.
Yes, past tense.
At present, problems that would require mediation nearly never occurred.
Us men were in the course of losing our strongest emotions.
With population also having decreased, people took the abundant land as hometown, and there lived inconspicuously.

Ktump ktump ktump ktump.
It has been several days since the sound of the metal brush of a mimeograph printing stencils had started echoing in the office for long periods of time.
After the bustle of the previous time, all my mornings and evenings were spent handwriting my report.
Though I called it a report it was nothing that adhered to formalities, it was written to remain behind among the office's documents, there were no significant differences between it and a diary, and so I almost did not get the feeling that I was doing work.
I finished writing without any particular difficulties, and it was actually the illustrations that almost took more of my time.

Once sealed for forwarding and for filing, I was quickly without anything to do.

"Grandfather, work please."

I drew close to my superior who, as rare, was at his office desk, nodding off.

"Mh-hm, got none."

"None cannot be, I would say."

"And yet I got none."

"Well, I was told that this was a do-nothing job."

"So do you want to do some cleaning, at least?"

"I did it yesterday."

In fact, I did it the day before that as well.

"For that, when I came this mornin', there were still something in the trash."

"Do not talk like you are a mother-in-law, please. An easy and creative job, please."

"Why you, talking like an impudent youngster..."

Grandfather, cornered, crossed his arms.

"Let's give a try to fieldwork, then."

"In practice it means I work as I please, that there."

"This office of ours values independence."

"Advice that has no independence, that."

"That there I'm requesting because I want you self-reliant. Now then, I guess I'm going to undertake my work of siesta."

That was not work, and to tremendous extents.

"Uhm, Grandfather, what sort of work were you doing in the beginning?"

"When I came in the situation was somewhat different. Yeah, there were things to do. Still, as far as things concerning fairies it wasn't much different than today. After all, contacting them on a regular basis is hard."

Recalling the hardships and the particulars of last time, I exhaled a sigh.

"...indeed it is."

Grandfather clapped his hands as if he had thought of something.

"Well then, could I have you go on a bit of an errand?"

"Eh, is that... for work?"

"Course it's work. The acquaintance is my assistant."

"Uh-huh."

I recalled.

Grandfather already had an assistant.

In other words a person I could call my senpai.

"He was a beastlike, uncultured male, was he?"

"He's the ideal effigy of a young person."

"Ahhh, I remembered. Today I will go out in the field. I simply must research the culture of the fairies."

"Don'tcha run away!"

"I am not good with people that I do not know."

"So fastidious... who do you remind me of?"

"I am now leaving. Today I may be coming straight back home, so please make something good to eat."

"What a granddaughter to have. You don't make anything but sweets, if you don't at least learn how to cook, what are you going to do after I'm dead?"

Ignoring the sermon I took the bag in hand, and right then I spotted an odd thing thrown away

in the office's waste basket.

"...now just what is this?"

I did not remember throwing this away.

I picked it up and showed it to Grandfather.

"Ahhh, that was the trash left over. Big, isn't it. Nothing but trash. Isn't that complete trash?"

Flesh and blood relatives that would blame their granddaughter indirectly and sarcastically do exist. Everybody be careful.

"Is this a paper model, perhaps?"

"No idea. The wind or whatever must've carried in something made by a child, I'm guessing."

"This is all crumpled up."

"Because I crumpled it up when I tossed it away."

"This here, it was made by folding a single sheet of paper, you see? This is quite something, do you know? Ahhh, this might be origami. Using many sheets one can make a complex... Grandfather?"

Grandfather was leaning on the back of his chair and exhaling a sleeper's breath.

"Jeez..."

The elderly fall asleep in an instant.

With the piece of trash on my mind, I toyed around with it on my own.

Having been crushed by hand there were parts that were damaged, but its original shape appeared to be fairly complicated.

Folding this with paper had to require quite the skill.

As I worked it, I discovered that a tiny hole was opened in a joint.

Knowing the trick behind paper balloons, I tried puffing my breath into it. In an instant, the tiny paperware inflated, regained the shape it had before being crushed, jointed legs made papery sounds as they squirmed...

"EeEK!"

Startled, I tossed away the piece of trash.

By coincidence it fell into the waste basket, that thing that had... an insect-like shape.

Worse, it was tremendously realistic.

As I was only cognizant of it as a scrap of paper, I did not notice until I had inflated it.

...the whole deal felt clearly malignant.

"...y-, you knew and had me examine it anyway, did you Grandfather?"

"ZZZ."

Feigning sleep, are we.

He constructed an elaborate insect via origami and laid it there in order to startle me, and! no! mistake!

Though I did not mean to, I even let out a serious shriek.

The individual, the simple, and the ones with shells are all insects I am able to comparatively speaking stand, but artistic larvae (with colorful protuberances every which where) and larvae that live in groups, now those would really make a person go crazy. That origami there had truly something artistic to it. And I would really prefer if people did not startle me, if at all possible. In particular, adding a hole into which to blow air was malicious and perfectly calculated.

Same as with Grandfather, who was pretending to sleep, but inside he was chuckling.

I peered into the waste basket, inspecting that nasty design.

"This is way too realistic..."

Now that I looked closely, I saw the peculiarities of an arthropod.

It did not have the stylish figure of a centipede or a millipede.
If I had to say it, it had a shape like a zori, one of Japan's traditional sandals.
I remembered having seen this creature somewhere.
"Is that a pillbug...?"
That felt sort of off target.
And yet if I were to flatten it out, it would have that very shape.
A perfect reproduction down to even its countless legs.
A prank that truly, and I mean truly took time and effort.
"ZZZ."
I shot him a disappointed gaze, but there was no apparent sign he was going to wake up.
"...I am going out."

The mountain of garbage, several days later. Although a path I was used to, it had me walking inclines for a while and that of course left me a little sweaty.
The fairy city so detailed yet unimaginative in its construction remained as it was, but it was as if the feasts that unfolded here a few days ago had not really happened, as a deserted mood pervaded the air. There was no sign of anyone, either, and even I could distinctively feel that this was not a fun place to gather.
I believed that fairies were a species that was very sensitive to the basic concept of fun. Fun was what can never be perfectly replicated even when the same situation is recreated. When a wave that the eyes couldn't see reached its peak, there came the transient instant of fun. What they, the fairy species, liked was that sort of precious single drop, I believe. In the first place, they did not settle down permanently.
Even if a large crowd gathered in order to play, they did not form a society on a large scale. This is said to be because they did not require to produce food in order to live, but it was not a definite truth. It appeared that normally they each individually wandered whatever place they pleased. At times, when people were acting alone or in small numbers, they did chance on a fairy. I too, during my homecoming I did coincidentally spot one. Their doing so could perhaps be in order to search for fun things.
The events at the trash mountain metropolis had them truly make merry. Guiding fairies into settling down would have made my job easier... and I acted based on that idea, but on seeing that result, there was no other conclusion except that my understanding of them had truly been naive. What I had done merely created a temporary amusement. It left behind a number of valuable sketches, but that was all. It did not reach the point where a strong relationship was created, one that was useful to the unchanging activity of mediation. As I made the rounds of the mountain of garbage that still retained the shape of the remnants of a city, I tried reaching its opposite side. I glanced around to see if at least one remained to play, but there was nobody.
"Whew."
To settle down my breath still quite ragged, I sat down on a miniature building that had toppled sideways. I took out a single milk candy from the pocket of my bag and put it in my mouth. Like Grandfather had said, I seemed to be better at making sweets than normal food. Also, at The School, cooking practice was not part of the curriculum, either. I was always striving to make candy with the glucose syrup made with the rationed water and chocolate as ingredients.
Well, it is true... I was however capable of boiling crayfish as far as cooking went (that is a joke).

Today's snack were milk candies plainly made with cream and glucose syrup. They were carefully wrapped individually in hygienic paper of different patterns.

As I sucked on candies while bathed by the sunlight I was able to freely forget all kinds of things. Linear functions, for example.

"...one more candy."

As my physique was one that did not grow fat, my ability to deter sugar intake did not exist.

A slight sweetness spread within my mouth. The unsophisticated candy made only of distilled cream and glucose syrup was enveloped with sugary powder, so the finished product had a depth of sweetness that never ended and never stopped.

"Just one more..."

The time of supreme bliss continued.

By the time the fifth was rolling around my tongue, I felt a gaze on me.

The thing, faintly piercing me from the side of my face, said that the size of the human looking at me was small.

"You were... Chikuwa-san, am I correct?"

That was the voice I cast towards the tiny face carelessly jutting out from the grass.

Mr. Chikuwa twitched with a start.

"Ah, ah, ah..."

"What happened? How come you are over there?"

He seemed to be sort of afraid somehow...

Why, do we not know each other?

"Hellooo-o?"

"Plll!"

His attitude said that he had to run away. On the spot I clapped my hand, emitting an intense plosive sound.

As he approached the grass and tried to push his way through, all that pitifully rolled there was a colorful sphere. Mr. Chikuwa was startled by the sound and rounded up.

I took him in hand and looked and,

"Ah, he's wet..."

He looked like he had gone incontinent.

Even if left be he would resume his activities in a few minutes or so, however I held firm the sphere with one hand, with the other five fingers I adhered to its surface, with nimble motions I pressed the sensitive points, and then,

"Coochi coochi coochi coo."

"...!ngh..... awww!"

Unable to bear it the sphere split wide, and the limbs and the head folded inside juttet out. He struggled and writhed, but as he was held fast, he did not manage to run away.

"It has been quite a while since we last saw each other, Chikuwa-san. Coochi coochi coochi coo."

I just up and continued.

"HaWahWah~n!," he pitifully wriggled around, but he could not run away from the tickling.

"Me-, mercy~! Mercyyy!"

This seemed to be the proper moment, so I released him.

"Do you remember me?"

"What?" Mr. Chikuwa gazed at my face at point-blank range.

"Come now, it was just a few days ago."

"Ahhh!," it appeared he did remember me. "Don't eat meee!"

"I will not eat you..."

It felt like we had this sort of exchange previously as well.

"Eating me, that's totally not good you know? It will break your tummy, you know?"

That attitude of begging for his life was one clearly directed at someone he did not know.

Ah-hah. Could this possibly be—

"That's 'cause we have all been transferred to Yellow Number One and all that!"

Yellow Number One, he said?

"But... if you must... if you must eat me, then... then..."

"Chikuwa-san, this I cannot believe, but you completely forgot about me, did you not?"

I was met with a jaw agape.

"...yes?"

"Please recall when I gave you a name."

"Name?"

"That is correct. When did you start being Chikuwa-san?"

"Now then...?"

"It has been just recently, has it?"

"....."

Fifteen seconds of sinking into silence.

"Ahhh!"

His face that had fear mixed into it suddenly softened.

"It appears you remembered me."

"Ahhh! This here, this here it's, it could be said to be my lucky day, can it?"

"That is correct. The sky is blue and the weather is fine."

"So it is~!"

"So, once again, good day to you."

"It has been a while."

Letting him be suspended by one hand, he hung his head with a bow.

"But forgetting me is quite mean. And that is despite how not that many days have passed since then."

"Ahhh, I am ashamed~."

He dazedly tilted his head.

"One point deducted."

"Nooo!"

"For you people, a single day may be quite a long time, I see."

"Every single moment feels like eternity, you know?"

"My, I do see it."

I happened to let out a giggle.

"By the way, there is something that has been on my mind for a while."

"A good thing that it has!"

"It is just a little bit, but did you perhaps get a suntan?"

"Awww, it's that thing, then!"

Mr. Chikuwa had gotten a full body tan.

"Why are you wearing nothing but a skirt? You caught a tan because you were naked, you know?"

Worse, the fur-like skirt let a King of the Jungle wind blow in a little bit, did it not.

"You! Can! See! My! Pantieees!"

"Now what are you talking about?"

The fairy said that with a triumphant face.
 "I'm living with nothing but my naked body!"
 "Well, that is a nice thing, everything else said."
 "You should also go naked, master human!"
 "I'll eat you."
 "Piiiiiii?!"
 "I am joking."
 "Your jokes make my heart throb fast, master human!"
 Is he suffering from battering, I wonder?
 "A maiden will not disrobe."
 "Is that true!"
 "Now that I look carefully, that skirt has a chikuwa pattern, I see."
 "Wow, even that!"
 He became embarrassed.
 "I really like chikuwas, I do."
 "WahPaaah?!"
 "I told you it is a joke... well, I must say that you do not resemble one, however," and I let him down to the ground. "There, have it. This is what you wanted."
 I flashed one of the milk candies before Mr. Chikuwa's nose.
 "Ahhh, ahhh!"
 Mr. Chikuwa lost his self-control and hopped up and down, grasping the candy with both hands. Fishing successful. Even if I lifted it up by approximately fifty centimeters, he left himself to the sway as he dangled in midair.
 "Nooo, pleeease!"
 I released my fingers, he lost his balance, and he flopped back first as he fell. He did not release the candy that he was holding so dearly at his chest.
 "That is something I made by my own hands. Please, enjoy it."
 "I will give it importance by eating it!"
 "Then how about I give you one more?"
 "That's incredible~!"
 He looked up at me with a surprised face.
 I pushed a second candy into his arms. Mr. Chikuwa was shivering all over, as if he thought this sequence of events impossible.
 He sat seiza, and with the two milk candies held under his arms,
 "When can I marry you?"
 "You cannot."
 "I see!"
 He didn't seem discouraged at all.
 "By the way, where are all your friends?"
 "They're all in good health and being primitive over there...?"
 I did not understand that.
 "...did you say primitive?"
 "Who knows?"
 Like a math primitive?
 "Then I will change the question, where did they build a settlement? Will you show your big sister?"
 "Yes, I will do my best!"

Mr. Chikuwa began walking. He then stopped on the dot and cast me a gaze. Come with, he meant.

While walking, Mr. Chikuwa said this.

"...are you going to eat me from behind?"

"Now then, will I, I wonder."

"Awww~!"

As if controlled by the shivering on his back muscles, Mr. Chikuwa squirmed. I did not mind that. After all, the person himself was expecting that.

"...y-, you know I have lots of tiny bones?"

"They seem abundant in calcium, so they would be fine, would they not."

"EEEEEEK!"

"It is here... is it?"

"That's where it is!"

At the location I was led to there was a vast savanna.

That said, this was not the African continent.

One of the corners of those ruins I was familiar with had been turned into a savanna.

With unknown means, and on a preposterous scale!

When I cast my sight afar, I could see the outline of old buildings and trees that tangled with them, which created an irregular horizon. Right over there would be the world that I knew well.

With some kind of procedure they cut down flat the ruins and the trees in a specific area, planted low trees and grass in that reclaimed land, and transformed it into a savanna. In what may have been a shockingly brief time.

"...last time was certainly surprising, but you really did it on a large scale this time too, huh."

"Wide is good."

"So that is how it is."

Their grand objective had to have been the reproduction of the kingdom of the wild.

I could more or less picture the settlements in this environment.

There was a further short walk of several minutes, then I spotted the primitive village that I had imagined.

"I'm back!"

Mr. Chikuwa addressed them, and from the small group of thatched roof homes built chaotically, fairies showed themselves like a rainbow after the rain.

They immediately spotted me, and their already typically round eyes opened wide like ginkgo nuts.

"It's a human!" "Bwooooh!" "Are you serious?" "Can we get close?" "Won't they get angry?"

"What are you going to do now?" "Ayah!" "So big!" "Do you like destroying things?" "Hyeeeh!, hyeeeh!" "Please give me a ride!"

All of them were wearing skirts.

"Guuu~ys! I got them, the precious sweets~!"

Mr. Chikuwa went and lifted up high the spherical candies.

There was an applause from the population.

"They're milk candies!" "We got candies!" "Oooh!" "What a nice smell!" "I want the wrapping paper!" "Are they hand made?" "What tree did you pick them from?"

Mr. Chikuwa answered.

"They were given by the human!"

"By the human?" "They're not just big!" "Will you give me a candy?" "Incredible!" "I don't

believe it!" "You didn't overdo it, I suppose?"
 "I still have plenty, do you want them?"
 When I made that proposal the village immediately grew excited.
 "Please~!" "Ahhh!" "I want one!" "So painful!" "Did history itself move forwards at that moment?" "Today it's a festival!" "GyaWah!"
 That came with a force such that it nearly turned into a riot.
 In a hurry I fished into the bag and took out all the milk candies.
 The round candies made a mountain on the savanna.
 And a large number of fairies surrounded that.
 "I see that of course I do not have one per each person, so please split them up and give some to everybody, all right."
 "Can do it only by using this item!"
 What Mr. Chikuwa brought was a stone tool.
 A rudimentary weapon made sharp by chiseling off rock.
 For the fairies, who possessed superscience, it was quite the primitive thing.
 Worse, the fairies possessed no strength. And the stone they used for making the stone tool...
 "That is a pumice stone, is it, that there?"
 "Seems it is!"
 As I thought.
 "But it's heavy, so I'll remake it later with thick paper!"
 Thick paper, he says...
 "But will that not make it useless?"
 "I'll use my motivation?"
 I understood.
 "Then, I'm splitting these up!"
 They lined up the spherical candies and, as he took a kendo-like stance, the village was enveloped by an audibly silent strain.
 "T'ah!"
 The stone tool struck ground.
 "T'ah, t'ah, t'ah!"
 Ground, ground, and also ground.
 The face of someone who had accomplished something looked up at me.
 "Truly, the Earth cannot be split!"
 "Are you not mistaking your goals there?"
 "Really!"
 "You are very bad at using tools, are you?"
 "...doing this is hard!"
 And that despite having good motor skills. An unexpected blind spot for a super-species.
 "I will do it for you."
 I did not use the stone tool, too small for my hands, I picked up a stone of around ten centimeters of diameter.
 And then smacked it into the candy.
 Looks like the angle was bad, as the candy bounced off with tremendous force, creating a uncontrollable pinball dashing between the fairies who were looking at the process with breaths held.
 If this had been for a game I suspected that I would have struck the high scoore (one moment of panic).

It was a terrible accident that caused a large number of injured both light and heavy (right back to calmness).

""P!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!?!""

In an instant, the village was dominated by fear and confusion.

"It's begun!" "Genocide! Genocide!" "It's a billiards accident!" "HyEEH!" "Please let us look forwards to an afterlife!" "Entirely unbearable!" "Nyoooh?!"

"Oh no... I am sorry... it was not on purpose... uhm... I apologize, truly... I did it with no ill will, really, no ill will... uhm... do not cry..."

Consolation required thirty minutes.

Of course everybody went incontinent, did they, and on the dot...

By the time I had somehow managed to pacify them and returned to splitting the candy, the population of the village had halved down.

The others had run off somewhere.

"We have lost population."

"...I am sorry..."

I had accelerated their depopulation.

This time I delicately used the weight of the stone and used just enough strength to press it against the candies and hit them.

My work continued in solemn silence, as a subtle wave of fear directed at it from the fairies who had each hidden in their own building.

"...it goes sort of like this, I believe."

The parts may not have been equal, but regardless I managed to shatter all the round candies in tiny pieces.

The fairies' eyes were shining as they approached.

"Waah!" "We have candy!" "Sweeetsy!" "There's so much!" "Milky!" "This is happiness!"

"Delish!" "A full textured flavor and despite that mellow!" "It will be the foremost talk of the village this year!" "This fulfills me!" "Really delicious!" "I'm so glad to be alive!" "It's got really some flavor, you know?"

The candy party was merry with cheers and hollers.

I sat down comfortably among them and participated.



"Incidentally, Chikuwa-san."

"Yes?"

"Last time there was this amazingly futuristic city, so how come you are in a primitive age?"

"We tried and regressed?"

I could not see anything positive coming from that, I had to say.

"Ah... master human, we need to discuss a thing," and he tightly raised his hands.

"Come at me with all you got, please."

"Now that you say it, it's sort of like, we are trying to do things in sequential order."

"Eh? Sequential order?"

"Kind of feels like you wanted us to do something like that, right?"

Hmmm, and I went and traced my lips with a fingertip while I thought.

It felt like I did say something with that as gist the previous time, then again it felt like I had not.

In their memories as they were treating me like a god, only those words were imprinted into them— wait, no, no, no, this was a problem, was it?

"...this comes down to me meddling with the internal affairs of their country, what then?"

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing, merely talking to myself. Hummm, so you are doing things in sequential order, and then?"

"And then that's it!"

He went and dodged the question.

"We're doing all that humans were doing way back in the beginning. But we can't really seem to progress to the next age."

"Progress, right..."

I had a feeling that that was being restrained by their own will, however. Something like a rule that they had decided upon.

"We want to progress, and do it right!"

"So you say, but..."

"Master human, how did you do that?"

"Ah, a matter of history, that. That is no good."

"HoYoh?"

I came close with my head as I declared this.

"Well, there are no documents."

"There aren't any?"

"They have been lost."

"Lost they were!"

He acted nonchalantly, without any sign that the fact was shocking to him.

"Is there anything we're lacking?"

"Lacking, you ask."

"What you humans had, and we don't have!"

"...welll, conflict, just maybe."

"Conflict...?"

Mr. Chikuwa repeated the word as if scrutinizing it.

A chilly something passed down my spine.

"Ah, wait a moment, please. Forget what I just said."

"AhNah?"

"I was mistaken. It is not conflict, it is hunting."

"Hoh."

"Hunting, in short tracking and killing."

"Hunting..."

"To survive, they had a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. From that, people developed ways to live better as well as technology... I believe."

"I get it!"

"It is just, I believe there are no large animals that could be hunted around here, see. And first of all, your people does not need to eat."

"Hmmm... hunting..."

It all ended there, for the moment.

Where could they possibly have learned to do all that?

The technological prowess with which to create a future city in a dumping place for garbage in one night, and to turn ruins into a savanna, I meant.

"Fairies don't even have the basic concept of fighting."

So went Grandfather's words, and I had no opposing viewpoint. That said, if it was all as said, the question remained unchanged about what sort of process they had gone through in order to possess technological skills so advanced, so random, and likely so much more developed than those of former humanity.

And that savanna thing... they took down ruins and woods and planted in a vastly different environment, a feat that surpassed science and came close to being some sort of joke. In fact, their sophisticated progress of science was indistinguishable from the joke.

How could they possibly have learned all that?

"Before answering those questions, I want to hear your opinion first."

"But I am asking because I do not know..."

You are Miss Graduated with Honors, at least on paper, right? Honors, I mean it, you got honors, right? To quote the dictionary, achievements and knowledge superior to the average, that's what it means. You got honors beyond those of the other last graduates of The School, right?"

"...there were two of us."

A somewhat bent V sign. One was me. As an aside, the other was my friend Y.

"But the curriculum had decreased in size compared to your generation, Grandfather. Also, in the fields where the teachers in charge had passed on and there was no one that could teach them, lessons were held by teachers with time to spare who gathered together and stuck their heads into the documents that had been left behind. Even if we have the same degree, the density has changed between now and the past. But from that idyllic education we came to have a pressure-free educational system from which I gained the abundant imagination and flexibility that could renew humanity in their nature."

"A pressure-free educational system, you say? You're making up weird words... if you have abundant imagination, then try imagining, how about."

"It is much too abundant, and when trying to think about things I do not know, all that I come to have is delusions. Therefore, things I do not understand I do not investigate and immediately ask about."

"That's a bad side effect of pressure-freedom!"

"But see!"

"I get it... enough already. I won't tell you to show off your extensive knowledge. Just try giving me your guess, whatever it is."

Being told that meant my brain could not be allowed to play hooky on this.

The history of how former humanity reached science, to the extent of what I understood right now... that would be—

"Stealing each other's land and resources?"

"That won't even get you thirty points."

"...the progress of technology was stimulated by the pillaging between different species?"

"I remember that your specialization is cultural anthropology, but... do you seriously think that?"

"Having received an unidirectional and immature beating by a giant of knowledge, my feeble little mind quickly began screaming out."

"Don't say that out loud."

"Please wait a moment. I will now be trying to connect all the knowledge that fills me."

"Here's a few hints. You don't need to step into the biological aspect, like the ecosystem and such. You can also exclude the lifestyle of humanity at its dawn, which had little influence on the environment."

As happened only when I was panicky, the inside of my head became perfectly blank.

"Uhm, in other words... the hunter-gatherer lifestyle... it reeked of blood, the way they lived had the sun always glaring down on them, and they were always starving... and that was why weapons were developed."

"The famous political thinker Hobbes also said something like that, right²."

"Then did I hit the mark?"

"I should take your degree away."

"What I just said was a joke."

Grandfather had had a fair bit of status at The School, therefore he could actually have the right to take my degree away, which set me quite on edge.

"Ah, I have a thought. A hunter-gatherer lifestyle made for a comparatively abundant lifestyle, did it."

"...it did."

You understood at last, went Grandfather's sigh.

"The time they expended in order to live is said to have been very limited. Sure, we saw cultures that culled the children among other things in order to restrain the population, but their was not the lifestyle that we imagine, which had them always starving for food. They had to increase their population, because there was as much food as could be wanted that could be gathered from the land."

"Were there no wars?"

"I'm guessing there were. But it wasn't that sort of contact with other tribes that led to the development of weaponry. Humanity slowly spread through the world with its hunter-gatherer lifestyle. And within their lifestyle, gradually primitive agricultural skills were developed. This here is the question, so what do you think people gained through agriculture?"

"Food."

"Class flunked."

"...that was a joke."

"Really?"

"Of course. Hmmm, actually... through agriculture, people... gained, I believe... a stability of lifestyle."

² I was unable to determine the source of this.

"Mh-hm, well, I guess it's true..."

A sigh of relief.

"If I'm to add to that, through a stability in provision of food, the population that could be sustained became larger, that's that."

"And as the population increased, the division of labor occurred, correct?"

"Exactly. Kings and priests and all that, people who had specific powers and charisma were released from the hardships required by living. Among the specializations that were created with that, there were also the warriors."

"And specialization encourages the development of technology, I believe?"

"That's right. Therefore, the progress that the fairies mean is the passage from hunter-gatherers to farmers, and indicates the technological development that the former humanity had reached. Now then, how about this, dear granddaughter, have you seen the point of them playing hunter-gatherers and not advancing beyond that?"

"...I have. The majority of the reason is in the point of them not needing food to live, I think."

"So we have reached the sixty points level at last," and Grandfather let out a teasing smile.

"Right, the fairies possess no sense of urgency when it comes to preserving their own lives. Therefore, they have no need for farming. Consequently, the technology they have need of is, in practice, nearly nonexistent."

"...however, they are in fact eating sweets."

"I suspect there's no candy on this Earth that can fill all their stomachs. It ought be viewed as a food they're addicted to. Sort of like alcohol with former humanity, I guess."

"...but it is the hunter-gatherers that give me the impression of being less civilized, however."

"That's because they're hunting, I guess. Hunting is good. It's majestic and it's good."

Grandfather's finger gave a couple of hard squeezes to an invisible something in the air.

That invisible nozzle was pointed my way, subtly fanning my unease.

"Which in conclusion means that the fairies playing at primitive age have, in practice, the sole goal of a life of hunting and gathering, that is what it all is going to come down to."

"How they're just playing at it might be the fatal flaw, right."

"...well then, in the first place, what would they need to do to develop technology?"

"If you managed to investigate that, I would personally give you a Nobel prize."

"Would that not be simply a counterfeit..."

"Being that it's the greatest mystery at present, understand."

"What is your opinion, Grandfather?"

"It was developed in the pure quest for fun, I can't but see it like that. In their culture, things like the division of labor to accomplish science and technology doesn't exist."

"...mmmh. But their technological skills have been developed in their spare time, right? No matter how closely I look at them, there are incomprehensible things that appear to be nonsense..."

"If you're interested then you should research it for yourself. I can score your report, if nothing else."

"...this is a rare chance, and I am indeed in the mood of stimulating them a little. It is a possibility that the present event could replicate the specifics of their development."

"Hope it all goes well, but... there, this will do, how about?"

Grandfather presented me with a white one-piece that he had finished mending. The frayed spots had been solidly mended.

"Thank you very much, this was done quite nicely. This is one I really liked, too."

"How 'bout learning at least some needlework."

"People have strengths and weaknesses, you see."

"And what's your strength?"

"Studying, for one."

"..."

My strength... it made Grandfather lose his words.

Having decided that, for the time being, I was going to live on the more superficial layer of my job, once noon was past I took my take-out bag and stretched my legs towards the primitive village. This was all field work. It was vastly different from what I had anticipated.

I was unable to keep my patience with the mud-like flow of time in the office with nothing to do, that was true, however my contact with a different species was much more stimulating than I thought.

This was, on its own, not bad, that was what I came to think.

I came from the Village and went into the ruins area, advancing west through the large road that was once the main thoroughfare.

Former buildings towered at its sides like a mismatched wall.

These buildings, covered every which where with ivy grass and all that, had been eaten away by nature herself even inside, and they towered like revenants.

Though called woods it was still a land close to a peopled village, and there were no dangerous beasts roaming it. As far as dangers there were the odd wild dogs, but even those were rarely seen, as dog hunts were carried out at regular intervals. Just in case, I did carry self-protection, but if possible I would have liked to avoid coming into a situation where I would have to use it.

I double-checked the map that I had sketched beforehand.

A number of buildings, traffic lights tilting over, rusted-out cars:

using those as landmarks, I discovered the hidden entrance to the village of our adorable little fairies.

"...it was around here... I am certain..."

Pushing into the thicket got met with a little bit of resistance, but as I advanced just fifteen centimeters I all too easily reached to opposite side. There the thicket had been taken down and vanished, becoming a savanna.

Over there laid the fairies' village, built to avoid people's eyes like in the ages of traditional myths and folklore.

What means they used to make this absurdity real were a mystery, however.

"...this might have been created with actual magic."

My own declaration made even myself exhale a sigh.

Fixing up my wheat straw hat I once again began to walk. On a ground with no ups and downs walking became lighter, but in exchange all things that intercepted sunlight were gone. I was putting the canteen to my mouth now and then when I spotted the village.

And, right then,

a ferocious presence suddenly rose up behind me.

"...?!"

As it was aiming for me, an experienced and unfearing and competent beauty, I calmly accepted that fact but in that while however my flesh and blood was cowardly and unable as I also was to take out the weapon I brought for self-defense I was made clearly and vividly aware of the flawless crevice that separated my body and my mind which said I had to resolve myself that this was just going to be it and while I did that I swirled with a

desire and fear for a young life that was difficult to take in no but really I should just say I do not want to be eateeen!

I just barely managed to turn around, but right then my knees failed and I fell down with a thump. I was in that condition when I came to see before me the ferocious predator.

The core of my own self was cowering in fright in an instant.

Fangs aligned with a will to kill, muscles in its four limbs that had the will to fight injected into them, a skin with a patched pattern that engendered a visceral fear into those who looked at it. That beast now lifting up its head I recognized just from my knowledge.

It was what was thought to be the largest carnivorous dinosaur, the mythical beast of the Cretaceous Period, a Tyrannosaurus Rex!

Though a paper crafted one (length one hundred and fifty centimeters).

"...well now?"

Its length counted the tail, so as long as it did not stand on its toes, its height was itself no more than sixty-seventy centimeters.

"Uhm... is anyone piloting it?"

The papersaurus didn't seem to have vocal cords, so though it did bare its fangs and roared fiercely, it had no words.

The mystery was in how it was moving on its own.

Normally, papercraft did not move.

Looking at it, I found that it was extraordinarily well crafted. Its construction was like boxes piled on top of each other, and its well crafted flesh was presented without any openings. This here was quite the high grade model. The eyes were just round gouges, but the body was actually painted.

It seemed to only have been heavily and disorderly painted with only primary colors, but somehow it still had quite the thorough design to it. It gave the impression of crayon coloring worked on by a master human painter.

The papersaurus was firmly nibbling at my ankle, but it was neither painful nor ticklish.

Curiosity surpassed fright, and I went and touched it.

"Well now, well well."

It was crafted so that even its joints actually moved.

As a test I tried lifting it up, and for having just an armful of size, the papercrafted work had an unthinkable firm weight. But it did not seem to have the weight such that a child could be inside.

"Then what is its motive force?"

I tried peering inside from the eye holes.

The papersaurus began struggling making papery sounds.

"Ah, there are rubber bands."

My spotting that made it twist about frantically.

Embarrassed, are we. So we are.

So your culture has you growing embarrassed when your very very precious rubber bands are looked at.

It vigorously pushed at me (it was maybe making a ramming attack), so I went *"eiyah!"* and knocked it over.

Knocked over, it did not move even slightly for several seconds.

"Is it dead...?"

It rose up suddenly and, crestfallen, had its shoulders slumping as it walked away.

It got depressed, did he.

"???"

Now just what on this Earth was that?

The question progressed through my breast for a while, and then I happened on an even more startling scene.

A variety of living beings were crowding the savanna. That said... all of them were papercrafted.

"This is a development somewhat outside my predictions..."

There was not even the space for doubts, this was the doing of the fairies.

As far as my eyes could see, the savanna was dominated by swarms of striding papercrafted dinosaurs.

The concept was the same as the safari parks that the former humanity enjoyed in the past, I would say.

There were stegosauri with magnificent plates on their backs.

There were triceratopses with flawless horns.

The things gliding overhead were pterosaurs, I surmised.

This was a well-accomplished dinosaur kingdom abundant in variety.

A real size of roughly ten meters became a size of about one meter. This put them on one-to-ten scale.

Looked at from afar, the sense of distance quickly went awry and gave the optical illusion that there were actual dinosaurs far in the distance.

Suddenly I came to feel an itch so I lowered my eyes, and found a small-type dinosaur (though all of them were small-type, do mind) which was biting at my calves.

It reminded me of a chicken, but it was an actual dinosaur.

Species was deinonychus, I believe. In truth they were carnivorous dinosaurs three meters from tip to back, and were said to form swarms and attack even dinosaurs larger than them.

They were the prototypical feathered dinosaurs, as well. The cape notched up in the shape of a tanzaku, one of those verticals strips typically used for poems, reproduced that, indeed.

"Hummm... very well crafted. Ninety points."

Although it was something closer to the play bite, it would not have done to keep being eaten forever, so I gave it a light kick, and it got flustered and ran away. How cute.

I was still surveying the papersauruses as I decided to head for the village.

As I watched I noticed that the dinosaurs did not attack each other, and this appeared to be because they did not need to prey.

Not being hungry meant that conflict was also no longer required, I surmised.

The dinosaurs I happened to see appeared to all be oddly relaxed.

Even that one that came to bite me was only playing around, I was sure.

Last time I was jostled about by the developments and nothing else, but the events this time seemed good.

Let us show appreciation to the fairies.

After all, the present I brought today was...

"...oh dear?"

I ransacked the carry-out bag that I had dropped.

I inspected its contents.

Sketchbook, present.

Writing implements, present.

Emergency rations, present. Canteen, present.

Handkerchief, present.

Only one package had disappeared.

"H-, how? Who did it?"

I rushed my gaze all around, but the culprit's figure was nowhere to be found.

"...wha-, what?"

I tried searching around for around ten minutes, but I am sad to say that I could not recover the stolen item.

"I do not believe it, was it the fairies?"

I believed them able to sneak into that bustle and quickly take it away, but I did not believe that they as a species would do that.

"I do not understand..."

As it was not exactly a valuable product, either, I decided to leave this mystery unsolved.

Regaining my presence of mind I set out to walk, quickly arriving at the village.

"Good afternoon, is everybody all right?"

"...this has become something like hell!"

"Chikuwa-san, you look really tired... and it has been only one day."

It did not appear to be a problem concerning only one of them.

The whole village was enveloped in a stagnant mood.

"What is all this?"

The residents were also depressed.

It also appeared that the population had decreased considerably.

"...we were defeated in our struggle for existence?"

"Defeated, you were?"

"All our heirlooms were stolen, you know?"

"Did you own heirlooms?"

"We did, that!"

"Which has the meaning of?"

"We had sweets, they are gone now!"

"Are we talking about that kind of sweets?"

The fairy nodded.

"Sweets are so important!"

"You fairies are always secretly carrying sweets, and those... were stolen?"

"ExactlyYy!"

He started crying.

"Come now, come."

I stroked his head with a fingertip and he began emitting a sleeper's breath while still standing.

"Wake up now."

"Gh'mmmh~."

I tried pushing his head in with the fingertip.

"Careful, it will make me contract, you know?"

"You cannot fall asleep halfway through a conversation."

"I wasn't sleeping!"

"You did fall asleep."

"Mh-hm..."

"Ahhh, you meant that thing! Truth is—"

Chikuwa-san's words went only that far.

"P!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!?!"

I heard a scream coming from the square.

"What happened?"

"He-, he's heeere! The demon!"

"...the demon?"

And arriving by striding over countless tents...

"Ah, that is a gigantosaur, is it?"

It was the largest of dinosaur, said to be a theropod with a physique one size larger than that of a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

"Do you know it well?"

"...I abbbolutely have not looked up any animal larger than I in order to feel safer, do understand."

"Huh."

The paper gigantosaur, if we were speaking only of length, was about two hundred centimeters long. Truly mega.

Even if we considered the sole height, it looked like he had some eighty to ninety centimeters to him.

Although built from papercraft, I could feel the threat from something of that size.

Looked at from the fairies, who were less than ten centimeters tall, it was truly a demon.

Mr. Giganto trampled on the village without hesitation, sharply spotted one of the fairies who was too slow in running away, and went to attack him.

"Huuuh?!"

The victim rounded up on the spot. It was the defense technique typical of fairies.

I suspect they stole it from pillbugs.

Mr. Giganto mercilessly turned its fangs on the fairy ball.

However, of course, and I do mean of course, it was a defense form.

He could not stick his fangs into it that easily.

Right then Mr. Giganto held the prey in his mouth and flicked it overhead, catching it again with the mouth, and took the perfect stance to toy with it.

Or so it was at the start, because the guy then showed off even a fair number of ball techniques, indeed.

"Ah, it's a header! Like in football."

"Skilled, isn't he!"

Mr. Giganto appeared to have a slight superiority in handling the ball.

"Oooh, dribbling."

"Drib!"

His footwork was also something.

"What sort of point is there to catch it with the tail?"

"He never did that before!"

Well, that was for sure, but still.

The victim too had had enough, and came out of his defense mode.

Now that it had come to that, there were no possible means with which to rescue him.

He tried running away, but it seemed that having been shaken so much had damaged his semicircular canals, as he made a U-turn and went colliding into Mr. Giganto's shins. It was a cartoon-like The End, that.

Mr. Giganto was going to be eating that. It bit at the fairy's head and began a noisy

mastication. It was tragic.

"Survival of the fittest is said to be the law of the world, still, this is amazing, isn't it!"

"He's getting gouged out!"

Eventually, ptooie, the victim was spat out onto the tents.

"As I thought, then, they do not digest."

Mr. Giganto skillfully stole away within his mouth anything that struck his eyes.

Ostentatiously held aloft in its chin was something tiny and shining... it was a soft caramel candy, wrapped in tin foil.

"That is the World Caramel candy that the UN is rationing, three hundred meters each, is it not."

I really liked those when I was a child.

With the tinfoil wrap I could not tell, however there should have been all sorts of flavors.

"The Last Caramel has been taken."

Having swallowed its spoils of war, Mr. Giganto went to leave the village with a satisfied step. The danger had passed.

The fairies, some of which had run away and some of which had hidden, little by little returned to the square with relieved faces.

It appeared that this attack had decrease the population of the village even further.

At the moment, the 'funness' of this village was a hole with no bottom.

"I see, so those dinosaurs use sweets as normal food."

"The village's sweets, they're gone..."

It appeared that this was the cause of their depression.

"Chikuwa-san, a question if I may ask."

"Yes ma'am!"

"It was you who built them, correct?"

"Guess so!"

"What do you believe you are accomplishing in being driven to extinction by things you yourselves have created?"

"Wah, that there, I knew you'd say that!"

"You are telling lies."

As I was in the midst of cracking jokes, I realized.

Who was the culprit behind the stealing of the contents of my bag, that was.

Deinonychuses, I was quite sure, hunted in packs.

They are said to have quite the high intelligence for dinosaurs.

Enough that they could have used one of themselves as decoy in order to accomplish their job, that was.

"...I see, so that is why I was attacked."

"What?"

"Truth is, today I had made some supplies for you as well. Supplies of sweets. As I was coming here, they were burgled by your creatures."

".....really?"

"*Really.*"

"That... sounds like a comedy sketch, so, apologies?"

"I am quite all right, do mind, it is merely the sweets that have been stolen."

Mr. Chikuwa gazed at me as if saying he could not believe it.

"So, the sweets are now..."

"At this moment, inside the belly of the dinosaurs, where else."

"Gloom gloom gloom..."

"That is all because you built those things."

"At this rate we're going extinct! We'll starve for fun and go extinct!"

"You reap what you sow, do you not. Worse, you are letting things powered by elastic bands make you go extinct, you know?"

"We really like elastic bands!"

It was like they had no sense of danger.

"Cap!"

One among the fairies that were listening to our conversation from around us called me while standing up straight.

That fairy had a primitive spear assembled with a stone weapon of a type called projectile point and was wearing a helmet made of buffalo skull. On that subject, both the stone weapon and the skull were of paper (meaning contradictory).

"You were... Cap-san, were you not."

"Yes, that's my pen name!"

So it was a pen name.

"Pleased to see you after all this time. You have also gotten quite the tan, I see."

"It's a big problem, you know?"

"So what are you going to do about it?"

The Mister boldly stepped forwards, faced his depressed friends and called at them.

"We hunt!"

The people all at once lifted their heads?

"Hunt?" "Hunting...?" "If we tried that, we'll be the first hunters?" "Isn't it wonderful to be alive?" "We are going to hunt to live!"

Hunting.

For the ancient, primitive village that had cooled down as it lost the sweetness of candy, that alone shook the hearts of the population.

Ahhh, the time in which the seed of combat was about to be planted into the history of fairy society had come at last, it seemed.

If that was true, then I had nothing to do but to accept that fact.

Keeping that fact concealed would sort of be for the sake of my own skin, however.

"Look at this!," and he held up a prey. "Spear!"

""Ohhh""

The population was inspired.

"With a spear!," and Mr. Cap boldly swung around his spear, "T'ah! T'aYah!," he made a wonderful display of a series of sharp stabs, "I'yaah'Toh!," and as last he made the spear soar as he revolved high up in the sky, "Skyyyyy'Yh!," and he stabbed into the ground headfirst.

"....." (He had peacefully passed out.)

Just for one instant, the place turned into complete silence, but...

"Piii!" "He stopped living!" "This is a serious emergency!" "He got switched off!" "Dear me, that's too graphic, you can't show that!"

There was a big uproar.

"...I really thought I was going to die!"

Mr. Cap lifted himself up while holding down his head.

"That was very good until part of the way through, however."

"Yeeeah!"

Mr. Cap, in a good mood, once again took spear in hand and advanced in front of the villagers.

"I have defeated myself!"

""Ooohhh!""

Sigh, it can even accept that sort of excuse, can it, this species here.

"With the spear?" "We get the sweets?" "We get them back?" "Can we?" "If we can't..." "Or maybe..." "We stab them with the spears? And then we take it all back?" "What if this is the true Sweets Revolution?" "What if we need to make lots of spears?" "That's right, that's right!" "Then, we fold paper?" "We must fold paper." "To fold paper we..."

The whispering of the people converged towards a single conclusion, and,

""We fold paper!""

Yeah!, and they ran, headed for the largest tent.

"We got tools to work paper in there," went Mr. Chikuwa

"Are you not going?"

"Once in a while accepting extinction is the right thing."

Battereed.

"You are quite the M, are you."

Poke, and I shoved him with a finger.

"Ahhh!, more!, more!, toy with me some more!"

I so liked children, I did.

This looked interesting, so I felt that I had to carry on with investigating it.

Before a hunt was carried out, a ceremony was performed.

Surrounding the altar and a fire pillar, the large crowd of fairies dedicated themselves to prayer.

Mr. Cap, dressed up like a shaman, was dancing in the middle.

All of them were in a state of trance. They looked like they were having quite the fun.

At that point everyone had a paper spear in hand.

They were thin bamboo sticks with paper wound on them, they were spears made like parasol-shaped chocolate.

As the village was rising up to face a great calamity, they were fine things.

"Thirty pieces of jelly beans says that you will get kicked about and the villagers will go extinct."

I made my merciless prediction.

Low, so that they would not hear.

Eventually the ceremony ended, and Mr. Cap declared this to me.

"Master human, we are on our way now!"

"I have come to see you off as well."

"Oh my!"

Now that I had come this far, I had to watch over the conclusion.

"Then, we depart!" ""AYE!""

The Primitive Village Dinosaur Suppression Force lifted the spears they held in each and every hand, and departed the village in thick droves.

I too decided to follow after them without hurry.

Papercraft was inhabiting the savanna here and there.

So the Village Suppression Force quickly encountered its first prey.

"There it is!" "So that's what they are!" "It's big!" "It looks strong, what now?"

Well said in how it looked strong.

Its back covered in a skin like armor, the tip of its tail covered with bony protuberances like a blunt weapon, the ankylosaurus was called the tank of the Cretaceous era.

The papercraft edition ankylosaurus had a total length of around eighty centimeters.

It had flopped down the ground on its limbs, and was squatting, unmoving.

"What do we do?" "What should we do..." "Do it?" "Do we do it?" "Gotta do it!" "If we gotta do it, we gotta do it!" "We'll do it!" "Me, I'm doing it!" "Let's do it, let's do it!"

The Village Suppression Force seemingly chose this tough enemy as its first prey.

They were challenging a strong enemy from the outset, I saw.

Though called a tank, the ankylosaurus was a herbivorous dinosaur. Therefore, both his carapace and his tail were there entirely to protect himself. In practice, however, even a Tyrannosaurus could not avoid fractures were one to be struck hard by that cluster of bones that its tail was.

That said, as yet another, different interpretation had come up from the discovered fossils, further investigation was awaited, however as humanity had begun to run short of breath, the truth remained cast into darkness.

""Hey hey ohhh!""

The Suppression Force bravely charged this powerful enemy, who protected his sluggish motions with heavy armaments.

Lots of fairies stuck their spears on its back, but... its thick shell thwarted them, making their blades ineffective.

That same moment, Mr. Ankylo lifted up his upper body.

His long tail shot up straight behind him.

He stood up on his two posterior legs, lifting his front legs only somewhat as his back was bent.

As he kept his balance with his tail he dashed off with a speed that could never be imagined from his sluggish looks.

"...so this model utilizes that theory, I see."

There was a theory that said that the tail of the ankylosaurus was not a weapon, it was a counterweight used for walking.

Mr. Ankylo left together with some of the fairies that had stuck their spears on its back.

And the remaining fairies,

"...he ran away?" "Run, run!" "We won?" "Looks like it!" "Then, victory!" "Victoryyyy!" "Triumph!"

No, I believe the goal was to defeat it, what about that...?

"Let's keep this up and keep going!"

The morale seemed on the rise, so the result looked fine as it was.

They advanced a bit more and encountered their next target.

It was an intensely masculine dinosaur.

Delicate contours and a jaw that concealed ferocious destructiveness, and two legs equipped with savage talons were what stood out. Its profile, covered with a vivid blue down plumage, gave a stronger impression of a bird rather than of a reptile.

No mistake, one could tell this was a nimble and merciless hunter.

His length was about... fifteen centimeters, that is what it seemed to be.

"...so tiny."

It was a velociraptor.

A small-sized carnivorous dinosaur.

Worse, his length of fifteen centimeters included the tail's own length.

As far as height, he was shorter than even the fairies.

The comparison would be with a human and a large-sized dog.

"That one is small!" "It's a chibi!" "Can we beat him?" "Looks like we can beat it!" "Could this be an easy victory?" "And there's only one!" "Is God telling us to win?"

A generalized mood of easy victory could have been said to have been unavoidable.

As expected, they thrust their spears forwards all as one. They meant to fight.

"ATTACK!"

Mr. Cap easily stuck the first spear into Mr. Raptor, who was standing bolt upright.

But Mr. Raptor remained unfazed. He was not dying.

"Oh dear?"

Seeing Mr. Cap puzzled, I tossed him some advice.

"You have to cut his elastic band!"

"Ahhh, that's what!"

And as they stabbed and stabbed and stabbed him with spears, a spearhead severed the elastic band.

Making a *k'saah* on his death throes, Mr. Raptor fell on his back.

"Waaah, it died!" "It died, it died!" "We made him die!" "We're natural-born hunters, aren't we?"

No, you are a comedic life form possessed with warm and friendly genes.

That being said, a victory was a victory.

They seemed to be doing better than I expected... but as soon as I thought that, we saw what came from the basin to their left and I took that back.

The might that scene had could be described with writing, that said I decided to intentionally describe the truth in simple ways.

What was there were,

Velociraptors x 167

(I did count them).

""Pi'GIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIH?!""

The Suppression Force became ruled by fear.

The raptors emitted a bullying aura, they were truly an ill-bred bunch.

Sigh, now this was going to be where things ended.

"Everybody! Fight!"

At Mr. Cap's order the rest, while hesitant, took a stance with their weapons.

For their own, the group of raptors also began looking menacing.

On the edges of the mouths opened wide and pointed our way grew full with teeth.

"..."

The spear slid out of Mr. Cap's hand.

Having lost their will to fight, the fairies were attacked by the swarm of evil dinosaurs.

"Nooo!" "Neeein!" "Help meee!" "Stoop!" "Ahhh, nooo!" "Haaawn!" "We'll be eaten, just like sweets?!"

They will not eat you, you saw that.

And besides, the papersauruses are things you people created, seriously.

Raptors persistently toyed with their prey, though it possessed no sweets.

The fairies numbered less than forty, so they could not match them with numbers. Pushed back and trampled down and jostled about, they received a full course of bullying.

"Ahhh! Gooooooooood!"

"...you people always need looking after."

I did not want to meddle in internal affairs as much as possible, but since it looked like the game of Primitive Era would have ended there if I let this be, I decided to lend just a bit of a hand.

I took out the tool I carried around for self-defense.

It should have been effective even against the papersauruses.

First, ignite the conductive wire with flintstone.

"Here I go!"

Several seconds later the tool, which I tossed towards the dead center of the conflict, began violently exploding with a tremendous sound.

They were firecrackers.

In around ten seconds the gunpowder exploded in sequence, and by the time it had burned through all of it, the field was filled to the brim with rounded-up fairies and passed-out velociraptors.

"Won this on my own."

Heheheh.



The fairies were beginning to wake up.

As before, for some reason they seemed to have no memory of having lost consciousness. Seeing the annihilated dinosaurs, I explained that it was I who did that to them, and they believed that without a trace of doubt.

I was gathering upon myself gazes of admiration.

"So it's true, master human, you're in fact God?"

"That would be a problem for the real God."

"Have this!"

Mr. Cap reverently offered me the origami helmet he was wearing.

It was tiny and I could not wear it, however.

"Thank you... but with this, your trademark will disappear."

"We're not really attached to our identity!"

"It would have been better if you were, though..."

"But I'll make a replacement?"

And there, he pointed at the husks(?) of the raptors.

I understood. So he wished to wear the skull of the prey he hunted as an ornament.

So we have at long last developed magical concepts such as sympathetic magic and imitative magic, I see.

The fairies were growing darker.

"Everybody with me, take them down!"

Mr. Chikuwa instructed to the disassembly of the hunted prey.

"Chikuwa-san, what are you going to do once you disassemble them?"

"This?"

The fairies surrounded the raptors en masse, and went disassembling the "glued" parts with stone tools. Seems their strategy was to return them to mere paper and elastic.

The papercraft was disassembled before my eyes.

Astonishingly, they were created by a single layer of paper plus the elastic bands.

In the body as opened up there were elastic bands in every which where and direction, bundled as if muscles. This moved their limbs and made precise motions possible. So we were capable of the self-restraint of activities for the long time necessary to implement elaborate elastic motive power, were we...

"This is empty!" "This one too!" "Empty~!" "A miss..." "This one too, a miss!" "A miss, but what a nice miss it was!" "Quite the miss we got here!" "A miss, for being a miss, is still fine!"

"Ahhh, so it's a miss!" "As I thought, a miss!" "This has been an intentional miss!" "These are all misses, ain't they!"

In the conversations between the fairies as they disassembled, the term 'miss' flew around.

If there were misses then that means there should have been hits... what would those be about?

"Found some!"

Having discovered it, eventually one of them called that out, and took out a thing that had been filling the inside of the papercraft body. Mingling with the fairies, I also had a peek.

"Ah, but this is..."

Cubic and enveloped in tinfoil was... the World Caramel.

The World Caramel: the standard subsistence food that the UN had made for rationing with priority to the children of the lands. The objective being the intake of sugar in children, as long as one petitions one's hometown, even without a rationing ticket one could receive it every

time the caravan passed by.

The best characteristic about the World Caramel candies... that was the size.

There were some that were an incredible three centimeters per side.

This really let one know of the seriousness of the UN.

That said, as they were staple sweets, they were also sweets that were easy to get tired of.

The leftover caramel, through whatever means, had been seemingly eaten by the papercraft dinosaurs.

"The guys steal the candy and hide it inside their bodies!," went Mr. Cap.

"So they do not eat it. They are just hiding it?"

"Yes, at some point someone somewhere took it!"

The fairy that discovered it held the caramel high above him as he skipped and danced.

"Miss!" "This was a miss!" "Mh-hm, I see it's a miss!" "It's a hit!"

Another hit, a different one.

"This was nooo good!" "All empty!" "Naught, there was!" "Got a miss!" "Ahhh, found it!" "This too is a Candy Get!"

The raptors that were a hit seemed to be scattered around.

The recovered candy was piled up tightly.

Caramel, round candies, bell-shaped sponge cakes, bean-jam wafer cakes, tiny donuts, wheat gluten candies...

"There's lots!" "Definitely enough!" "Really leaves an impression, right?" "I think hunting's awesome!" "Doing a hunt fast sounds like donuts!"

The fairies were rapturous.

"Anything else left?"

"This one here is the last!"

Only the last one had remained for disassembly.

"Then!, everybody fold up an empty box," went Mr. Cap.

""""Yeah!""""

They took the disassembled raptors and, following the lines, folded them up.

Just by changing the way it was folded, the complicated, mysterious pile of paper parts patterned after small-sized dinosaurs became paper boxes. Astonishingly, they were the size of a peach tree cigarette box.

"Do we use elastics?" "Put them in the box!" "And on top of them!" "Put the sweets!" "It's done!" "Yaay!"

Time for the design was seemingly taken into account, as the exterior of the box came to be in the style of a product package.

The ostentatious text on the upper part went like this...



Animal Sweets for Good Boys (papercraft included) ~Third Age - Dinosaur Edition~

"Sorry, but that smells fake."

"Excuse me?"

"That is complicated stuff, why is it coming in the shape of a box, and so easily."

There was a limit to how much nonsense I could take.

"Who knows?"

"For what possible purpose is it in a salable package, if I may ask!"

The circulation of goods had collapsed anyway.

"Ah, uhm... but, but... truth is the papercraft is the main thing, but if we don't say it clearly that it includes sweets, kombini won't put it on display!"

"What is a kombini?"

"...now what was it?"

"Even you do not know."

A headache came to me.

"Still, if product distribution was still alive, this might be an item that could sell quite well, for what it is..."

"Righty right!" (Proud.)

"By making the exterior box part of the kit, you gain in number of usable parts. Are you going for the Good Design Prize? This is dirty, indeed!"

"...are you angry?"

"In a certain sense, I am impressed."

"Woh hoh hoh!"

Next thing I noticed was that all the raptors had already been returned to their packaged state.

There only appeared to be just one problem.

"Leader! Leader! There's not enough sweets in the boxes!" "Nothing to be done!" "But I for one am concerned?" "I still wanna put in lots of sweets!"

And there I finally noticed.

"You people, you have this amazing technology, but you cannot make sweets?"

Thunk, the motions of all fairies stopped.

"W-, what is it...?"

Mr. Chikuwa answered with a face close to tears.

"...we have no talent for it."

"Talent?"

"Sort of, we can't make them well!" "They are nasty!" "We do want to make them!" "But we only make failures!" "Wonder why?" "Who knows!" "We don't understand the basic idea of

sweets!"

What a weird species.

"Only humans can make sweets!"

"So you turned the sweets you received into heirlooms and concealed them, I see."

They were therefore a precious thing to them.

"...by the way, when did the first and second ages come?"

"They never did."

"You started with the third age out of nowhere?"

"We didn't!" "Yeeeah..." "How should we explain this?" "How was it, back in the beginning?"

"Who knows?" "We so forgot it, all that!" "I'm getting all hazy..." "I believe that, there at the start, we were scattered about at the roots all over the world, and then—"

That fairy had uttered unbelievable words.

"We made photosynthetic prokaryotes!"

"Excuse me?"

Did I... just hear 'photosynthetic prokaryotes'?

"We thought that maybe we could make them with origami!, and when we tried, we did!"

Normally that would be impossible, however.

But maybe they could... they're fairies, after all.

I suddenly became confused.

"Then, we had lots of oxygen already there, no real reason to wait for evolution, we said!"

"Yup, it was like that!" "I'm sure that we sped-up evolution, we did!" "Partway through!" "We

made it, we made it!" "From eukaryote to multicellular organisms!" "Coelenteron, sponge,

ringed!" "That was about it, the rest was Leave-it-to-itself Mode!" "You really remember well!"

"Normally we forget." "When was all that?" "It was a ton of days ago!" "Dear me, but if we're too careless then we'll never be born!" "Can't forget that!" "More like, it's real hard to say it in human words!" "Relaying information's hard innit!" "But it's wonderful, yeah?" "It's wonderful, yeah, it's wonderful!" "Wonderful, biscuitful, targetful!"

"Coelenteron, sponge, ringed?"

Coelenterate / sea sponges / annelids.

As far as multicellular organisms, it appeared to be fairly appropriate line-up.

What, but in other words... they are saying they replicated evolution with pseudo-lifeforms made of paper...?

"The rest was quick!" "Really fast, really quick!" "A fun experience, it was!"

Is it really that simply to replicate evolution, and with origami...

I ceased thinking deeply.

"AAAAAAAHH?!"

Right then, the fairy that was disassembling the last raptor emitted a scream.

"What is it?" "Something to investigate?" "What, what?" "Tastey tastey yummy yummy!"

"LOOK AT THIIIIIIIIIS!!!"

It was—

"Ah, it is golden caramel, amazing."

It was a winning caramel, found very rarely among World Caramel.

It had a golden wrap.

Ahhh, the wrapping paper shone almost sublimely golden. So dazzling.

""Ooooooh!""

The fairies were stirred up.

"If you send this wrapper to the UN, they will send you a bottle full of candy, you know. One thiiis big."

""HaaUUUUUUUUWh!"

The fairies began being tormented.

"This is the first time I have seen it, as well. This golden caramel wrapper, that is."

Incidentally, even with silver wrapping paper, as long as you sent five of them they would still send you a can full of sweets.

That said, it was a different lottery compared to the gold ones.

Whichever it was, delivery would still take several months, though...

But this was the kind of waiting time that was quite fun, still.

I will stop being boorish now.

"Do you want me to mail it in? The thing?"

"If you please!"

I accepted the wrapping paper.

What sort of can of sweets will it be, now. I was a little bit curious.

"Guys, keep this up!"

Mr. Cap really stirred them up.

"Yeeeshy!" "Let's do it!" "Let's put some backbone in!" "This is hunting!"

And so it was that the mythological omen of a hunting culture came to take form in fairy society.

The papersauruses, whose disposition had them gather sweets, were a precious source of food.

There was no other way except for hunting them, this they came to realize as well.

The villagers, stone tools in hand, became capable of hunting from dawn till dusk.

New stone tools were invented one after another, hunting techniques with better effectiveness were planned out.

Even those who did not go out on the hunt went to gather natural sweets such as wild strawberries and gummi fruits, rapidly increasing the supply of sweet things.

That went exactly as it seemed it would.

The fairies were at present a perfect race of hunter-gatherers.

Even the village, in which depopulation was advancing, came to see a dramatic increase in people.

The Golden Caramel became a legend.

Due to thing about having to send the wrapping they could not hold on to it as it was, but the fairies carved a statue and worshiped that.

It was the statue of a hero holding up the golden caramel.



Faith increased the sense of belonging in the settlement.

The village developed more and more, making it seem certain that it will eventually see true urbanification.

"Hunting pack, depart!"

The fairies went on to defeat all sorts of strong enemies.

And they acquired a large number of sweets.

Stegosaurus (herbivore)–

"Marshmallow acquired!"

Allosaurus–

"Aloe candy!"

Iguanodon–

"Hand made potato chips!"

Epanterias–

"Fried dough cakes!"

It was truly a steady advance.

Eventually, they came to have an audience with the ferocious prince of the dinosaur world.

"Now! Attack!"

""Yeeeah!""

A mass of spears were thrown at the Tyrannosaurus Rex, his foot caught in a pit trap.

They could continue pouring on endlessly until the prey was weakened.

The success rate of hunting by trapping and throwing rapidly grew higher than that of charging in with a large group.

Even the powerful predator that was the T-Rex could not endure it.

Gasping and struggling as he struggled, he laid down, never to rise up again.

It was cruel, yet this was exactly what was called the Law of Nature. Though they were made

of paper.

Mr. Cap rushed at the thing's massive body, and with the motions of extracting a heart from a sacrifice, he took out what was hidden within. The terribly heavy thing was—

"Eh... this is... really big...?"

He took it out.

He made it appear.

It was a chocolate bar.

And naturally, it was no mere chocolate bar.

...it was an abnormal chocolate bar.

It made a tremendous first impression, so much that I wanted to phonetically write it as 'chocolate' in Japanese kanji. (Incidentally, that was 貯古齡糖 save-old-age-sugar, cho-ko-rei-tou.) However, would people be really smiling while wearing a T-shirt with those kanji written on it? That would have been quite impossible, I would say. In short, it was something like that, you know.

I was also somewhat confused.

Bluntly speaking, in the attempt to describe this chocolate I will be using more lines than the characters that appear in this record would use to explain.

First, it was huge.

Normal chocolate bars had disappeared from the marketplaces alongside the demise of material civilization.

However, it was possible to see it in photographs in old sweetsmaking books and the like.

Those were between seventy and one hundred and twenty grams, I believe.

Conversely, this thing (I got carried away with the kanji and renamed it 血汚冷屠 blood-dirtying-fridge-slaying) had a true weight of five hundred grams.

It was like an armored bar, that even throwing it would not make it easily break.

Though it should have been christened Armored Chocolate, on its brown packing paper, in white engraved letters there was only the short and blunt "CHOCOLATE" (in English characters this time).

If turned on its back, there was the usual UN mark.

Produced under UN leadership, I see.

This sweet, which had plenty of energy and was easy to digest, appeared able to save quite a few people's lives, when it was really needed.

In short, it was for use as a support good.

This armored bar of chocolate protected people from the invisible bullet of starvation.

So far I have said only quite good things, and still...

Well, that was sort of how things went, it was circulated with priority to those areas in which the food situation had worsened, it was not quite as easy to obtain in areas where living standards were stable.

Only the remainder was occasionally available for exchange with a rationing ticket.

To be sold not as a single bar, but split into loose parts... it was quite the sad thing.

This was an item made big and very thick, that just holding it in hand gave one a rush of happiness, but was actually a child killer. Bar version. To say it clearly, it was a rarity.

This had to be also the first time they have seen it.

The fairies had forgotten to close their opened mouths.

"This is silly!" "Impossible!" "Holy ****!" "This a dream?" "This a trap?" "This an illusion?" "We being deluded?" "Or maybe we're deluding?" "It's too big, it makes me hesitant!" "This is only for fools, or is it?" "Thinking calmly, it makes me excited!" "If you're talking calmness, then

saying it simply this is..." "This is..." "This is..."

The puzzlement of the fairies became a ripple and spread around, and then caused them to explode all at once in joy.

"IT'S A SUPER CHOCOLAAAAAAAATE!!!"

It was a symbolic scene that gave rise to the Age of Frenzy.

Brought back home, the chocolate bar promptly became the rumor of the town.

With the monstrous chocolate before them, which took eight fairies to carry, the population's expectations became all the higher.

Preservation was unthinkable. They lacked room for it in their hearts. They could only eat it.

If there was just one thing that was concerning me, that would be on the point of how to eat it.

As usual, a conference started among the fairies.

"We split it?" "Do we split it?" "We do split it?" "We get some of this to everybody!" "I'd be fine with leaving it like this, just looking at it..." "Ngggh, I wanna eat it!" "How to go around relishing it, that I dunno!" "My heart just hurts!" "A hard one, this!"

They just could not quite settle this.

"Master human, is there no good way to eat this?"

Mr. Chikuwa shifted the topic over to me.

"It would be fun for a brief while to just split it and eat it, but, let me see... with a volume this sizable, all sorts of varieties of chocolate sweets could be made, perhaps."

"Huuuh," and Mr. Chikuwa sat hugging his knees, thinking for a short while. "Lots of varieties... you said."

"...the sweets would increase, then?"

"Well, the varieties would certainly increase. ...ah, now that I think really hard about it, I would use other ingredients such as almonds, so whatever else may be said, they would be certain to increase."

"Is that magic?" "If the Super Chocolate increased, it would be a happy thing, right?" "But see, it's technologically impossible!" "Is that a miracle?" "Can miracles be caused?" "Then let's make one happen!" "Me, I can't hold back!" "We can still smash it apart and eat it!" "All sorts of sweets, be sooo nice!" "It's an investment, that's what, an investment!" "Master human, master human!"

"What is it?"

""""HERE!""""

Everybody together offered me the chocolate bar.

"...fine, fine, I will make something."

Which all meant I was going to be temporarily on my way home.

Making sweets took a fair bit of time.

Taking it easy meant the sun would have set before I could blink.

And if I took more than one day, it was also possible that the primitive age would pass.

"...half past eleven, is it."

If I hurried I should have made it.

Naturally, my feet also moved faster, but,

"Hello?"

On the way, I discovered something odd.
The thing was rustling in the thicket, so I parted that and examined it.

"K'keh."

Something was there.

Something bird-like.

Size was about five centimeters.

"Mmmh-hm, a detailing like this on this size, ninety-five points."

They were very well done.

Asking myself whether it was a bird troubled me a little. Around half of it was dinosaur-like.

But with characteristic straight feathers and the tail extended on its back tapered up to a point, it gave me a sense of déjà vu.

"K'keh?"

Also, it could speak. This was the Full Voice edition.

The papersauruses did not have this ability, indeed, not this one.

"Which means this is a new one...?"

It appeared the fairy in charge of design was developing things assiduously somewhere.

"K'keh, keh!"

With those parting words(?), Mr. Oddbird rushed back within the thicket.

Its flying capabilities might not have been that impressive.

If it was five centimeters big, that actually meant in actuality it was an extinct species about fifty centimeters of size.

Might have been a descendant of the pterosaur.

There was something about it that nagged me, but I could not quite put it into words.

"...oh no, the time!"

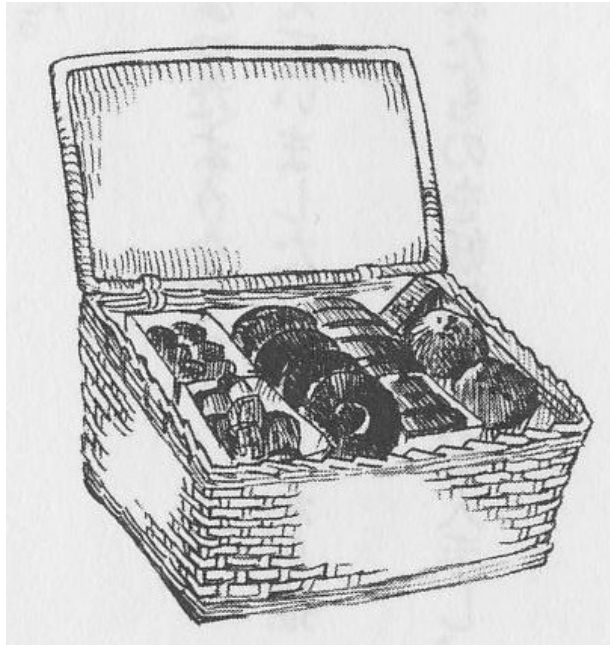
I absolutely needed to make those sweets.

I hurried down the path home in a hurry.

Chocolate crunch bar, steamed chocolate cakes, ChocoBits, chocolate twines, chocolate donuts... etc.

In the end, to complete this array of foods required one full day.

Jam-packed with the completed products, the basket became quite full.



I lifted it up and found it had quite the weight.

The next day I headed for the village, heavy basket in hand.

One day was for the fairies a period of a month or even a year.

The speed at which they lived was different, that was the reason.

Finding the village collapsed on the next day would have been an utterly unsurprising thing.

To them, a boring day was a vacuum hard to withstand.

And so, heading to the village only to find that its culture had run as far as it could run and had now collapsed... was a possibility. I wished to carry out my job elegantly, but I could not avert my eyes.

So there I went, hoping that their village had not dissolved.

Walking as I hoped that, I found something moving in the interstices of the savanna.

"...another new one."

It was a bird about twenty centimeters long. Its figure was like that of an ostrich that had grown muscles and had become intimidating.

In his massive beak he was holding a chocolate bar that he had procured from who knows where. Inferring from the size, it appeared to be not for business use but for distribution.

Foods differed between regions, so I suspected that the fairies had obtained it from an adjacent area, and the reason why it was there was that it had been stolen.

The bar was covered by a simple packaging.

Thinking about the scale, the real bird would be about two meters from tip to tip.

It did not appear to be an actual ostrich.

Whatever the means, it was definitely modeled on a living creature that had lived in ancient times.

With the motion of flinging out his beak he swallowed the chocolate bar and peacefully started to walk away. With the style of a majestic king, unthinkable in something powered by elastic bands.

"Being so defenseless means you will be attacked by the dinosaurs, you know!"

"Geraway!"

He had a weird cry like a hiccup.
I got a feeling like I was told to go away.
"Gera, gera!, way!"
With that whisper he vanished within the sea of grass.
"He was just telling me to get away from him, did he not..."
What else to expect from an irrational life form.
That said, adding that bird from back there, how come the bird species were increasing?
"...wait, ahhh, that is it... I understand, this is the Fourth Age, then."
In short,

Animal Sweets for Good Boys (papercraft included) ~Fourth Age - Birds Edition~

That is what it was going to be, was it not.
There were fairies that created beasts, and there were also fairies that drove them out.
Dear dear, this was what cause and effect were about.
That said, today, as a seeming reaction to all the new ones showing up, I could not spot a single papersaurus.
As I was carrying sweets, it was proper to worry about the unlikely possibility that they would be stolen.
It was a peaceful day.
"Good morning."
"Ahhh, the human has come!"
Happily, the village had continued to exist.
A large number of fairies quickly gathered at my feet.
"You seem to be doing well."
"We are doing well!" "Are we doing too well?" "We are very very very lively!" "We, who are worthless garbage!" "For some reason we are living!" "What a mystery!" "It's a mystery why we live!" "Truth is, we might not be living!" "It might be that the world is the delusion of only one of us!" "Around yesterday we were living!" "Now that you say it, we're still alive!"
"Ahahah..."
We had a variety of senses of value, it appeared.
There were a good number of opinions I would have preferred not to have to inspect closely, however...
"Well, I am glad you all seem well. And on that," I set down the basket before them, "do you understand what this is?"
"What could it be?" "What is it?" "It's a basket, so what?" "My, but it is a basket!" "Is it actually not a basket?"
"It is a basket. What do you think it contains?"
"It's a quiz!" "Maybe an exam!" "I so don't know!" "What is it, what's it?"
"...a difficult question, it seems."
Though this was something you people commissioned me, truly.
"It's got a good scent!" "Feels impossible to hold back!" "It just stirs me up!" "Can we open it?"
"Of course, you may."
The fairies opened the basket.
"Oooh!" "It's chocolate!" "There's so many!" "I predict painful sweetness!" "It is full of stuff I've never seen!" "Is it a problem if we eat?"
"Go on. This is what you commissioned."

"Are you sure..."

The fairies made faces like this was unexpected.

The chocolate banquet began.

Quickly the village's fairies went "*what is it, what is it*" and gathered up.

"Bwah!" "It's chocolate!" "There's lots of it!" "Can we have it?"

The square filled with fairies in an instant.

There appeared to be no more fairies who were afraid of me.

An unexpectedly great success in getting these wild animals to eat from my hand, indeed.

"Still, although the population has increased, the cultural level of the village has not changed, has it."

"...it hasn't?"

"Though the village having remained is a good thing, it feels that on the contrary it is progress that has come to stagnate..."

Having moved ahead in an instant to where it was going to be in the end, it felt a little anticlimactic.

For all that, what was this all about?

As far as them being so kind as to stay stable, that made records simpler, and easy was easy.

But was this state of being one appropriate for fairies?

Was my job actually coming along as a job?

That was difficult to judge.

"By the way, fairies."

"...aye?" "What is it?" "Do you have a question?" "Answer, we'll answer it!"

"The Fourth Age series are made quite well, I must say. Their molds are refined, and they are realistic in ways that is unthinkable from their being paper."

Faces with dropped jaws pointed at me.

"...the fourth!" "Did she say fourth?" "What about?" "Does it exist?" "Feels like it doesn't!"

"Are you not forgetting again? I did see two of them, two of those papercraft birds."

"Well..." "Maybe we made them!" "Who knows?" "I don't!" "That's not in our memories...?"

"Maybe our secretary did it?" "It's gotta be made by reproduction!"

"You just forgot all about it, I see."

Besides, secretaries and all that were irrelevant. Well, this was fine, however...

The banquet eventually ended.

"Your sweets are too delicious, master human!"

"It was nothing."

"What do you need to do to make them so delicious?"

"Huh?"

Being asked what one needs to do for them put me on the spot.

"For the time being, what do you say to some hard work at hunting?"

"I see!" "She is completely right!" "The more you hunt, the tastier things gets!" "Right!" "Then, do we go?" "We go, we go!" "Really wanna hunt!" "Success would be a good thing!"

The urge to hunt was strong among the fairies.

They sort of felt energetic.

"Heh heh."

My mood became a smiling one.

"If our hunt goes well, then maybe master human can have our sweets vindicated!"

"Do use the word 'variegated'."

"Sah!"

The hunting party was a crowd as it went out on the savanna. Unchanged, the savanna remained vast even today. It was not that there was no change whatsoever, as the perimeter of ruined buildings that soared to conceal the horizon had vanished. It had not simply disappeared, if I strained my eyes I could be certain of a faint unevenness very far away. It appeared that their savanna was somehow expanding its territory one day after another. This supra-natural technology could not be understood by humans. Talking to fairies, the general trend was that they themselves did not understand it, but the glimpse they sometimes showed of their knowledge suggested that a massive intellect laid in wait in their unfathomable depths. They were truly a mysterious species. Sad to say that unless they gathered in numbers they did not display that knowledge. Even when gathered, they scattered away at the most occasional of impulses. A miracle of an instant. When massive developments appeared in their world, they were as islands surfacing in between their gathering/scattering disposition, it was a series of tiny chances. Now, as I was walking the savanna alongside them, there was one thing I managed to understand: the development of the primitive village did not require anything like my guidance. The job of Mediator was neither control nor management, it was to be a go-between in case of emergency. To be a go-between in case of emergency one must build good relationship, gain understanding, and should problems arise, act speedily. And, at this point, no tragedy could be seen in the space between humans and fairies that would make one cover one's eyes. Perhaps there had been some in the past, however... right now, this had become a name only and not a real role. It was something like having lost my job even before I began undertaking it. I did not need to do anything. I only needed to watch as they did what they did. I was a bystander, eliminated from the true wargame of Progress.

"..."

In the very first period in which fairies had been found widely... in other words, in the era of the beginning of the UN Mediator Committee, extremely calm and cautious decisions were sought, and its Official Rules of Service seemingly reached the one hundred twenty-six articles. As one, then two hundred years passed, the near totality of those became null and void – they were stricken from the Official Rules. Right now nothing remained but a number of articles. There was already no more system for punishments and penalties. It was a do-nothing job, a job in name only. That said, even now there was a single specific clause that was an exception:

Article 3

It is assumed that Mediators, under supervision of their superiors, will engage in all of the duties pointed out in the following headings.

1) Attempt to build a harmonious relationship with the different species found in the

lands under their tutelage;

2) Should a calamity strike a species, they are to take appropriate steps as well as reporting a summary to their supervisors;

3) In case of sighting of vicious intra-species acts such as brutality / mass murder / war et al taking place in a different species' society, as well as their harbingers, besides reporting a summary to their supervisors, the Mediator must immediately proceed to investigate the causes and origins of these issues. Furthermore, in case of situations where the assistance of the Committee cannot be obtained, then, depending on their in-situ judgment, Mediators must attempt within feasibility to bring the situation to a peaceful conclusion.

Article three, third heading.

This could have been said to be, even now, the sole and only "living" rule of this duty.

Being the trigger puller of modernization of their city, the one who proposed the act of hunting, I could only have the feeling that I had crossed several quite dangerous bridges.

Therefore, right now, the fairies' culture being low and fixed was certainly not a bad thing, I believed.

That is correct. Not stagnant, but stable. Stability banzai.

I must have the fairies maintain this standard. That was the correct answer.

Making records would also become easier, of course.

"Prey spotted!"

One of the fairies raised his voice.

Where he was pointing was a papercraft mammoth, lazily spacing out in the sun.

"Huuuh, even mammoths then. This is the Fifth Age I would say, right. Heh heh heh. I just wonder who would be stronger if they fought against the dinosaurs~."

I uttered a childlike question.

A fairy answered me without hesitation.

"The sauruses have all gone extinct."

The mammoth was there because the Age of Mammalians had come in a single niiight!
(Totally losing my mind here.)

History had progressed while I was not watching. And by several dozens of millions of years. For all that we had a quadratic function, a squaring proportional function (I look like I am attempting to say something calmly yet I am still currently confused).

"This is too fast... the passage of ages is too fast..."

Having seen the rise of those odd birds, I ought have guessed.

Seriously, the accursed modern humanity is truly sneaky.

"Then we hunt!" "Hu-unt, hu-unt!" "Let's drive him in that trap over there!" "Go go go go!"

The attack had begun.

Phew, phew, the spears flew, stabbing the mammoth repeatedly.

As they did, the mammoth screamed "PAAAHN!" and tried to run away in the opposite direction.

And he all too easily fell in a pitfall trap.

The rest unfolded the same way as ever.

The attacks continued until he ceased breathing, and Mr. Cap, wearing a origami hat that looked like the skull of a buffalo, delivered the killer blow.

With some expectation, the fairies went to disassemble the mammoth.

What came out from inside its body was...

"Feels like I have seen that somewhere..."

It was a handmade waffle, sealed with a low-air permeability wrapping for preservation.

On its surface there was something I had seen before, or to say it, a drawing I remember seeing, the lively illustration of a cute fairy...

"...these are exactly like the sweets that I made."

I started feeling like I had been ripped off of everything I owned in a fixed game.

Why this world, it was too tiny.

"What is it? You see how much there is?"

"No... there is no problem, just... I am a little tired."

They were the things stolen by the party of deinonychuses, went my guess, they were inherited through the food chain, and as a conclusion came to fill the inside of the body of the mammoth.

"Have it, it's thanks you see? Thanks, you see?"

"Thank you..."

Receiving the waffle that I had made as present was quite the hollow thing indeed.

I took off the paper and bit in.

A way of eating I could never practice before other people.

It was somewhat untactful, but as the world's most delicious grid pattern shattered in my mouth with a crunch, a localized happiness was generated. Having one's problem pushed aside by this was what being a girl was all about.

"...I would sooo like some tea..."

Right now I could just gulp it straight down.

"Then, let's fold it up!" "Yeah!" "Fold it! Fold it!" "Our collection is growing larger, isn't it!"

"Returning them to boxes, putting sweets inside, it sort of makes you happy, no?" "Gotta hunt lots more!" "Looks like we love hunting, do we?"

It would be best if the fairies did not progress in bizarre directions, however.

""""Mooorning suuun juuust shining oveeer the maaammoooth!♪""""

With that loud victory song, we were on our way back when it happened.

I somehow seem to be good at spotting odd things.

"....."

Sigh, how to record my present state of mind.

It was a hard feeling to describe.

It was in part a bad feeling about things.

After all, what I discovered in the openings between the thicket was,

a being that I just happened to meet eyes with,

and that was,

in other words,

how to say it,

he was wearing simple clothes,

he had something in his hands that looked like a tool...

"Ah, ah, ah...!"

Inside my head a number of things took on a hint of concatenation.

The paper balloon in the style of a bizarre animal that I had seen at the office.

The dinosaurs.

The five centimeters long mysterious bird.

The twenty centimeters long-extinct bird.

The mammoth.

And the thing I had just now seen—

"Right... let us pretend not to have seen it."

"Yeees?"

"Nothing, talking to myself. Do not be concerned about it."

"?"

I am sorry for the fairy suddenly tilting his head, but I have seen the conclusion of this event. In the gaps of the thicket there was, well they were dinosaur-like, but no, there was no mistake... they were primitive paper men.



When I returned home I found that a honestly delicious dinner had been prepared.

There were french fries and well-browned fried white-flesh fish with a cabbage salad.

Having walked quite a bit that day, it felt truly delicious.

After my craving had been satisfied, I spoke frankly to Grandfather about what I had seen.

"Why the girl you have to be..."

Grandfather held his head with a hand as he sighed.

"This is a mess because you've interfered with their internal affairs, isn't it."

"I apologize. Still, I am glad we are able to talk. I felt far too uneasy in keeping this to myself."

"You should've talked before eating, dammit, before eating."

"Huh..."

"Oh seriously... still, the moment you spotted the dinosaurs you should've been able to predict this. They love to replicate the path that former humanity has trod, I expect that you'd learned that yourself from that thing last time."

"What you say is very correct and I have nothing to answer back with."

"What bothers me is the tools they had in hand."

"Of course... those were... rudimentarily made, however... those were... and I am not mistaken..."

I came out with the name of the tool that I myself habitually used.

"Whisks (like eggbeaters)."

I had decided to show up at the village early that the morning.

As I approached the savanna, already I felt something stirring within my chest.

"...none."

I could just about not even feel the very presence of the papercraft.

It felt like it had gone back to the time of the audibly silent, newly-crafted savanna.

It was unnatural.

Feeling like the strings of unease had been tugged, I headed for the village.

"It still exists... that is a relief."

Looking completely unchanged from always, the village remained there.

It also actually had fairies.

"Hellooo!" "It's Master Human!" "How is your day?" "Had nothing else to do today, either?"

"Hello, hello!"

Mr. Cap was also there.

"Good morning, Cap-san."

"...who, me?"

The fairy with an origami helmet on top of him tilted not his head, but his whole body.

"I'm not Cap-san, did you know?"

"...what, but see...?"

His face was... well, they all felt similar, so...

I did think he was the only one to wear eccentric hats, however.

"Dear me, you... used to have a tan, but your skin has oddly returned to pale, has it not?"

"It's like I'm pure!"

He must have thought he was being praised, as he looked happy.

"But can someone just up and recover from a tan, I wonder... but given it is you folks, then, well."

"It's us, it's us!"

"I see."

"By the way, I'm Helmet!"

"Have you changed your name, then?"

"Because of the nuances of life!"

"A life of attacking, then."

"We're all attack!"

"Posturing to attack is fine, however it does not appear you will be able to hunt, not anymore. The animals have vanished."

"Ahhh," though he did not seem to understand quite rightly, "how come?"

"Seems that you have driven them to extinction."

"Them being extinct is a problem."

"Did you just not hunt them too much?"

"We didn't hunt them all that much...?"

"No, I am sure that you have kept on hunting and hunting while I was not looking. You just do not have memories of doing it."

"Hoh?"

An airheaded response as always.

"In the Sixth Age you cannot hunt, of course."

"What is a Sixth Age?"

"The Primates Series, primitive men and ape-men, for example, they would fit under that, would they not?" I explained what I saw in the thicket. "Height was about ten centimeters, furthermore it was human type, it was."

Made of paper, however.

"How they use tools means that their intelligence is high, and so... although papercrafted, they would pose resistance."

"I really don't get any of that, though."

"Hummm."

"Waffles, those we still got lots of. Lots of sweets, too. And so, we're good for now, as far as hunting!"

It was like they could not see the very next day.

"Which all means, we get a banquet today as well! Have some too, master human!"

"It's aaall sweets!" "Banquet!" "Master human!" "Lah lalah!"

A ton of sweets got carried in.

Among them there were varieties that I had never seen before.

My interest was drawn a little.

"Nothing to be done, I suppose."

The Hour of Sweets had passed.

Next time I ought bring the tea set, I decided. Genetics called for tea with sweets, and there was no possibility that I would not pass on that wonderful culture even to them.

"By the way, about this thing that could be called the Age of Gluttony..."

"Huuuh!"

There was just no helping these people.

"...if you are careless, the rising new species could attack and annihilate you."

"Ridiculous!"

Dooooom!

The rising new species had come to attack.

"Piiiiiii! Enemiiiiiiiiis?!"

Somebody shouted that.

The villagers made a panicked commotion. They ran every which way.

Teamwork was zero.

Unable to work out a single counter, they let the enemy attack as they pleased.

Instantly the village transformed into a corner of Pandemonium.

"Waaah!" "Hyyy!" "W'piii!" "Enemiiiiis!" "They're insiiide!" "Ruuun!"

The ones that had come to attack were the paper primitives.

They whom I had witnessed the day before.

No, I am hesitant to call them primitive people anymore, these were highly coordinated troops.

They were not naked. They wore armor.

They had spears with paper arrowheads and a bamboo body, paper helmets, and paper armor.

Not a stone age culture, but a paper age one, it seemed.

"And are those... horses...?"

They had domesticated papercraft horses and were riding on their backs.

Horse riders contributed them far more attack strength than we could imagine.

There was also a difference in weapons.

As far as I had seen, the fairies possessed nothing but primitive spears.

The way they were did not require any technology beyond that.
 Conversely, the Paper Primitives were covered all over in high quality armaments.
 Worse, they did not only have paper.
 Indeed... they had cardboard.
 Cardboard, the most powerful of papers.
 It had strength, and made it possible to pack all kinds of heavy things.
 It had a vast number of uses, and tradition said that in the Golden Age of Former Humanity it was used even in bedding and dwellings.
 I cannot quite imagine how it was used in dwellings, however.
 "On the aspect of strength, there is a vast gulf between it and flimsy paper."
 "Hohoh~!"
 "You are quite calm I see, even at this time."
 "It's not my problem, so what?"
 Ultra-cool.
 "But this might also involve you at some point."
 A defensive line belatedly formed in the square.
 However, the fairies knew nothing about fighting this, and without even decent weapons, they were routed by the cavalry in the blink of an eye.
 "Ahhh!" "So strong!" "They're so tough!" "What are we gonna do!" "We can't win!" "Run away!"
 "Piiiiiii!" "Nooo!"
 And like that, the fairies came to scatter about. Aw aw aw aw.
 The cavalry even came my way.
 "Look, they come."
 "Oh dear?"
 "You should also run away. They will not be nice to you."
 "Will they now? Will I see you again, master human?"
 "If there is a next festival."
 "Oh, I get it!"
 With a carefree face devoid of the human emotions of anger and sorrow, he nodded several times.
 "See you again someday!"
 Whoosh, and he disappeared with the speed of raging wind.
 The cavalry seemed to have no interest in humans, as they ignored me as they rode around, running roughshod over every corner of the village.
 Seeing one of them had worked a mammoth tusk as-was into a spear, I was convinced.
 It had not just been the fairies who had been hunting mammoths.
 There were many more varieties of large animals somewhere I haven't looked, out there in those savanna.
 As two species dwelling in the same territory hunted all at once, the pressure of the hunt rapidly drove the larger creatures to extinction.
 What remained were the two species of the savanna.
 Conflict could have been said to have been inevitable.
 And so we arrived at the present, where the last culling was coming to an end.
 The fairies one after another went past the fences, being driven off towards the savanna.
 Tents were toppled, fences were destroyed, even the few sweets that had been saved up were stolen, and they all gathered in the square.
 The scene of the demise of a civilization was none other than this.

"How cruel."

And thus was the end of an era announced.

Facing my tiny friends as they ran away, I gave a small wave with my hand at my chest.

"Everybody be well!"

"oi, little miss granddaughter."

Having my writing interrupted made even the graceful maiden I was let out a groan.

"...what is it?"

"You're making a nasty face."

That was because your behavior would make displeasure show bluntly on one's face.

Although I would have preferred that he had at least tastefully called it "sorrowful".

"Please do not talk about that. What is it?"

"You know, there's this rumor going 'round the village that they've witnessed something odd out in the ruins..."

"Something odd, such as?"

Grandfather gave me a gaze of suspicion.

"That there seems to be elephants and tigers and all that stuff made of paper and wandering about."

"..."

My gaze and Grandfather's struck each other straight and forwards.

"Well, did you go see how they're doing today?"

"I have not, after all I am writing this... besides, that is odd. The fairies have scattered, you see? There should be no one building papercraft anymore."

"I know, but are you sure they really dispersed? As far as I've heard, that series of mammals hadn't been released yet."

"They have in fact dispersed. Right before my eyes. They were raided by paper humans."

"Mh-hm, so you can't be certain, still, do you believe that groups of those animals were introduced to the environment?"

"I think so. I have not seen the fairies build the papercraft themselves in the first place, however."

"No mistake, it's all stuff that they built."

"So that is what it is, then, but... there are also things that just do not make any sense to me."

"Like?"

"Well, how the paper humans I had seen the day before last were holding primitive whisks."

"Mh-hm."

"Then, yesterday the very same species had developed all at once into a horseriding culture. Is that even a natural thing?"

"I see. So long as they had domesticated animals dragging hoes, the limits on their population size would leap upwards all at once."

"Because they possessed lots of food, I see."

"That's right. The quantities of food provided by lands dedicated to farming is incomparable to those of hunter-gatherers. Consequently, a population of farmers came to have the leeway to develop specializations such as kings and priests. As a result, they came to have a more warlike disposition than a population of hunters-gatherers accustomed to the hunt. Farming cultures are by far the more barbaric and ferocious. Also, with farming comes the development of tools, and that leads to the creation of iron and bronze tools. If they have domesticated horses into rides that can be rode in to war, they would start to invade the

weaker civilizations that surround them. That's a surprisingly close reproduction of events. Might even say it was inevitable, yeah. Conversely, in a people of hunters-gatherers the population's nature is of equality and no one holds absolute rights. The reason is that saving up foodstuff is hard, so concentration of wealth doesn't happen. As far as this one example goes,"

"Well, sure, it was sort of like that."

I forcibly cut into Grandfather's talk, as it seemed like it would drag long.

Having his speech cut off partway made grandfather make a groaning face. Sigh, it was genetic, was it, this thing.

"...so, what's not right for you?"

"To the paper men, was food not actually sweets?"

Due to the whimsical setup of the fairies, the papersauruses had an obsession with storing sweets inside themselves.

Every one in that series was like that.

Of course, paper primates would also be the same, right?

I believed even Grandfather understood this part, so I decided to start my argument from the conclusion.

"The fairies cannot make sweets. Nor could the dinosaurs. But what if them, the paper men, could make their own sweets?"

The light of understanding promptly shone on Grandfather's face.

"...the whisk... that's what it was!"

"With that, it was not like they were farmers, correct?"

"Hmmm, mh..."

With their hunger sated through farming, the culture of the paper humans came to have spaces in which specialization could grow, and as a conclusion came to foster specialized soldiers.

A whisk made of paper would have certainly been inconvenient as far as usability went.

Eventually waterproof paper would have been created, paper technology would have improved, until they reached cardboard... and if we assume that they applied that technology even to the making of weapons?

"Mh-hm, it's really all about cause and effect."

"Their ability to craft paper to those extents came to backfire. Honestly, though, it also feels like they acted foolishly..."

"And that's what might be the good part. That's where they differ from humans."

Grandfather's face said he was deep in thought as he sat at the windowsill.

I then sat next to him, turning my face towards a refreshing blue sky.

"If the fairies have vanished, this brouhaha about the papercrafts will likely also settle down soon."

"That is true."

From the office on the third floor we had a sweeping view of the village.

"...mh? Somebody's coming."

"We have a guest?"

A tall and slender figure was leisurely walking on the road towards the building.

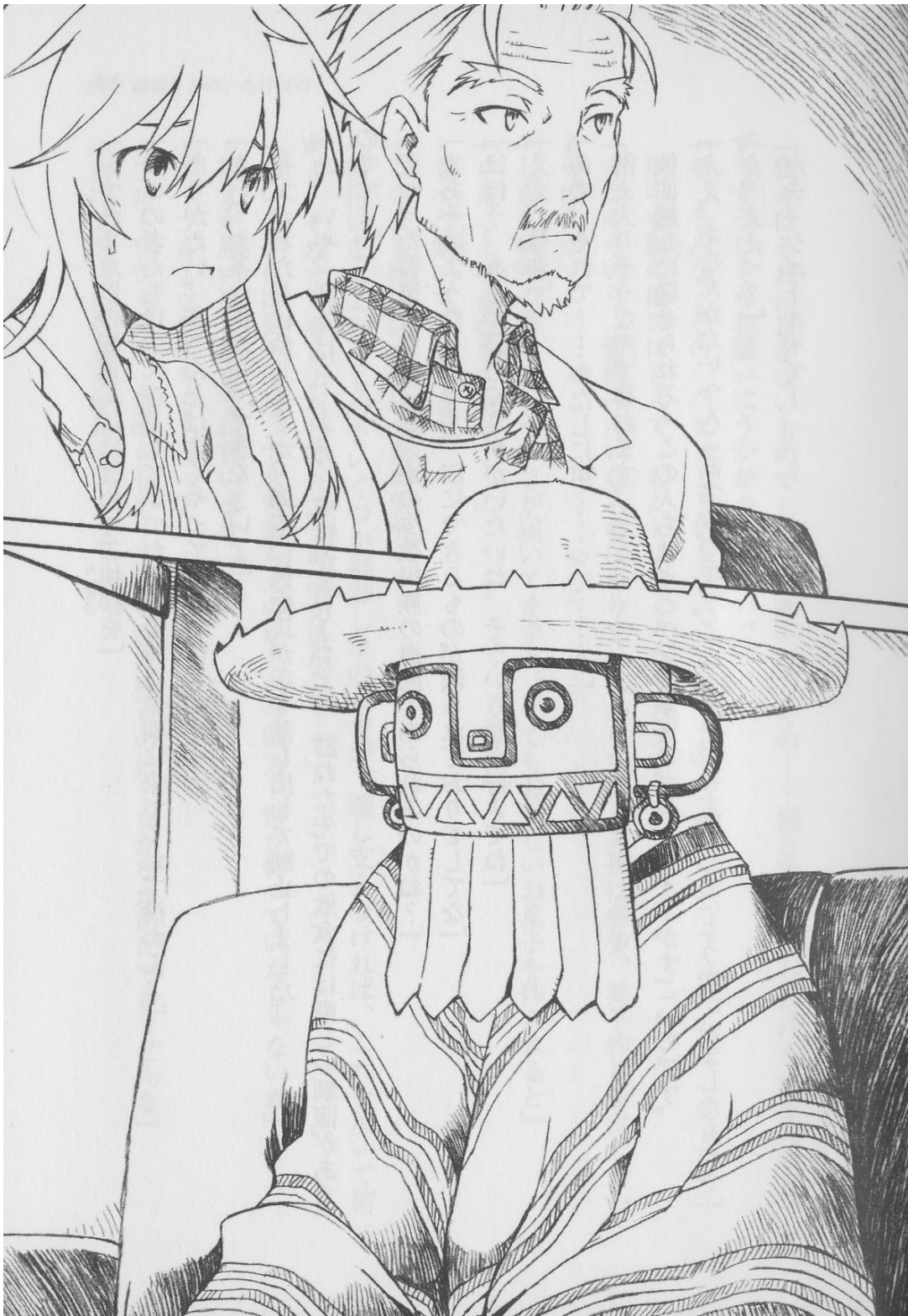
He was walking a little awkwardly.

That figure spotted us as we were leaning out of the third floor window and waved his hand.

"Excuse me, if I may ask. I am coming to visit the UN Mediator Office, if that is possible."

"It's over here!"

Grandfather shot back a voice towards the lower floors.
Yes, let us leave it all to him.
I promptly withdrew my head and returned to my desk.
Grandfather exchanged words with the traveler for a while, but,
"...oi, this looks like it has to do with you. Come on over."
"What? With me?"
"Do you have any idea why?"
I shook my head. I had nearly no acquaintances in the village.
Eventually there was a knock at the office door.
"No idea what's it about, just deal with him."
"Wah, wah-wah! Ah, ah-ah!"
My head went completely blank at Grandfather's absurd request. I waved my hands about in a panic, making my powerlessness known, but no matter how much I agitated the air, it did not cause any sort of change in the situation.
I could do nothing but first of all open the door and welcome him in.
I opened the door with shaking hands.
"...h-, hello... well, we are Mediators, so..."
The instant I saw that I was taken aback a little.
The person was wearing a mask underneath his hat.
It had a thickly, loosely drawn person's face. It sort of left an ethnic impression.
And the clothes, too, he was wearing a poncho-like thing down to his ankles.
"Wha-, wha-, wha-..."
"Ahhh, you mean this, my apologies. This is our identity. Well, think of them as our going-out clothes, please."
So he said with a mumbled voice underneath the mask.
"Uh-, huh..."
I was unable to react to that.
"Hoh hoh, that's a South American guardian deity, that there."
Grandfather began speaking with open curiosity.
"Indeed, when we made the mask we used the ancient South American culture as source."
"Mh-hm, looks like you used something discovered in the hanging gardens as reference."
"You are well acquainted with it I see, you don't even sound like a retired species."
"It's nothing, it's just me amusing myself with some diversions," and Grandfather beckoned the guest into the room. "Now then, do come in. Sorry it's so dirty."
"It's nothing, it's nothing. Then, with your permission..."



"Oi, get these lamps out of the way if you please."

"Ah, yes!"

Sigh, dark tiny small spaces were my favorite, and I was gunning for that one because it would have allowed me to secretly go at my own pace, but now that it was being used for its original purpose, well...

Grandfather and I sat side by side, with Mr. Mask facing on the opposite side.

"So, from which village are you?"

"Ahhh, from the foot of that mountain... we only settled in recently, however."

"That's nearby. I'd say a one way trip is several hours."

"Eventually, I hope to be able to once again greet the people of this village."

"The people here are take things leisurely, you see. When that time comes, do come freely, we won't mind."

"We are thankful. We wish to get along well with everybody."

"Oi, bring some tea or something already."

Grandfather gave me an order, but Mr. Mask promptly raised his hand and stopped me.

"Ah, no, we're... well, we have religious precepts. There are severe restrictions on drinking and eating in places we visit."

"That's some odd custom. Are you of some rare lineage off somewhere?"

"Well, it's something like that. What I can use my mouth for is limited."

"Ho hoh, I really want to hear the details later. I really like that sort of stuff."

"Indeed, of course."

"Uhm, and so... you have something... with me...?"

I asked with a vanishing voice.

"Indeed, it's because you are a really famous *pâtissière* (sweets maker) that I am here."

"Wha-, whaaat?"

He called me a *pâtissière*!

"We can never have enough sweets, and we absolutely want for you to, at least once, well... if you could treat us, I ask this knowing it's a very impertinent request."

"I'm-, I'm not, uhm, that much... of a pati-thing, no..."

I sandwiched my hands between my thighs and gave a slight nod.

"I know, right now she looks like this, like she's not remotely qualified. But well, my granddaughter has a bit of a hobby of making sweets."

"Regardless, the rumor has reached my village. It says that she can make very delicious sweets."

"No... truly... I..."

I hung my head even further down.

I feel like I could sink into the floor just like this...

"I did bring something to use as ingredients, so if it's all right with you, you could use these to do something... and then, if you wish it, next time we could commerce..."

"Oi, didn't you bring some sweets today? Earlier this morning you were making something, weren't you?"

Grandfather said that like he had remembered.

"...I have a bit of fruit cake..."

"Fruit cake?! Marvelous... we rarely ever eat uncooked foods like that."

"How about you give them a share."

"Ah, uhm... then..."

I brought back the basket at a jog, took out three slices of cake wrapped in paper, and like

that offered them.

They were tarts with seasonal fruits.

With wild strawberries as base, it then had a variety of freeze-dried fruits added, ending up as a pound cake. The staple cream had a slight banana flavor. The wild strawberries were used abundantly to make up for the rest of the fruits' lack of freshness.

"I'll give you this... and I'll give you this..."

"Unbelievable!"

"It is nothing that special... *mumble*..."

"I am on the verge of tears! Ahhh, what marvelous color and sheen. Ngggh, I just can't hold back anymore. Let me just..."

Mr. Mask lifted said mask a little and pushed the cake he snatched away inside his mouth.

"Oh-, ohhh... delicious, this is delicious!"

"...thank you."

"I don't really eat sweets that often so I can't tell, but does your species really love sweet things?"

"Extremely so! Sweets could be said to be the very driving force that allows us to live. Ahhh, a little more, just a little more..."

Mr. Mask promptly flattened the two cakes.

"Awww, I helped myself even to the last one, but this is something that I must have everyone back home taste..."

"They're fresh and uncooked... so you should eat them quickly... please..."

They may have been wrapped in long-conservation, low-permeability paper, but cakes will of course not last even a few days.

"That's true. Ngggh, I have so many more things I wish I could talk about, but... I must hurry and bring them home. Regardless, if you wish... we could discuss what we were speaking about earlier?"

"...eh?"

Grandfather nudged me with the elbow from the side.

"Looks like he wants you to trade with him."

"Trade..."

"Certainly. We have our own unique technology. In particular we have technologically reconstructed several raw materials that are now hard to come by."

"Raw materials for sweets?"

"Yes. Exactly."

There were weird villages in this world.

It must be said that, at present, relationships everywhere put the establishment of self-sufficiency as most important thing, making this an era in which getting one's hands on past-time goods was not quite that easy.

"...if you have a variety of ingredients then, well... I wanna check them... uhm, well... if I can..."

"Do you mean you will do this for us?"

"Sure..."

"Marvelous..." and Mr. Mask stood with force, shivering all over. It was a shivering of delight. "I must return to my village at once, and tell everyone...!"

"So you're going home."

"Of course! I am sorry to be so quick, but for today I must be taking my leave here. Before this treasure hardens out."

He carefully took the cakes.

"Next time let's be in less of a hurry."

"Of course! Well then, mister and miss Mediator! See you at the next opportunity!"

With the hurry of a gust of wind, Mr. Mask left the office.

"Whew..."

I was relieved from the pressure. A sigh of relief.

"That fear of strangers really hasn't healed a bit."

"Before that... Grandfather, have you noticed? When he lifted his mask..."

"...mh, yeah, that."

We faced each other and simultaneously opened our mouths.

"He was really papery." "He was quite papery."

I thought it unbelievable.

I thought it so, but I was also certain that I could not fully deny it.

I was convinced that the papersauruses and the paper animals were built each individually as separate series.

Well, it would be normal to think that.

However... it appeared that I had forgotten one important possibility.

Those living paper beings were far too well done.

With the unbelievably simple power of elastic motive force, they were able to operate with surprising elaborateness, as well as for long periods of time.

If so, it ought be no mystery if it allowed them to develop even more elaborate mechanisms.

For example... the mechanisms known as breeding, or progress—

"Now that I think of it, that piece of trash you picked up in the office, Grandfather..."

"Stop it, stop it, just thinking about it is insensitive."

"This is something we can just leave be, right?"

"They just wish for peaceful commerce, isn't it good enough? You too, from here on out you'll be able to make sweets to your heart's content."

"That is true, however... uhm, could it be... that the paper animals witnessed at the ruins... they could be adapting to the ecosystem... and in other words..."

Grandfather said this with an inscrutable face.

"If so, then things will be as they will be. Give it up."

"...ahahahahah!"

I unhurriedly sunk into the sofa.

With its door left wide open by the exit of Mr. Mask, the office was crossed through by a light and graceful butterfly that appeared to be oddly papery.

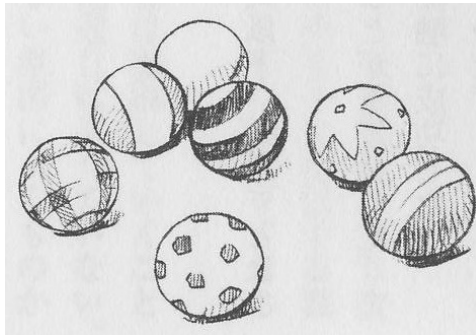
Fairy Memo - Rounding Up

When fairies are attacked by enemies, or are startled by loud noises, they roll themselves up and become balls, protecting themselves. This is called Rounding Up.

Fairies are quite nimble, but it's easy to pick them up when they turn into balls.

When rounded up, they have no awareness, they're in a state like hibernation.

A few minutes later they return to how they were and resume their activities. But at that moment, it often happens that they forget the reason why they had Rounded Up. Quite the mystery!



Periodic Report - April

1. First half

With an increase in new staff members, the Autonomous Ward of Kusunoki Village has attempted relations between the Fairy Humanity (henceforth 'fairies') and the Humanity of People.

Initially, conversation with the fairies was predicted to be problematic in the extreme, as their lifestyle covered a wide area and they did not possess fixed villages.

On that, based on a proposal by the staff member, a new means of gathering them was put into action. As a result, contact was successfully taken with four fairies.

At this stage, contact taken was extremely peaceful and law-abiding, and there were no problems of any sort.

Although individual physical characteristics were recognized in the four fairies, decisive basis for distinction was necessary in case they were found mixed among a large number of their species.

There the staff member proposed individual naming to the four each. As a species without the custom of individual names, but rich in ethnic curiosity, the proposal was readily accepted.

The four having been named Cap, Nakata, Chikuwa, and Sir Christopher McFarlane, the conversation could continue undisturbed (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Mr. Chikuwa (left) and Mr. Nakata (right)

Afterwards, the state of activities of the fairies, until then Scattered, shifted to Gathered.

The majority of fairies living in the vicinity were found Gathering, and population increased in density. Due to the Gathering of individual numbers, abnormal activities in the cultural as well as the technological levels came to be recognized.

At this time, fairly large-scale gatherings were witnessed, such as a massive city-like playground built in a single night.

These changes the employee observed with attentiveness and restraint.

At times the employee was invited to join the games with the fairies, local cultural interchange was carried out as smoothly as conceivable, and there were no problems of any sort.

As the previously existing research reports indicated, the Gathering phase lasted a comparatively short period (5-7 days) to then shift to the Scattering phase. This limited figure is a racial trait of the fairies, caused by the little continued interest towards things they

themselves create. On average the figure is a week, which coincides with the past records of this our Kusunoki Village, which can therefore be considered to be generally trustworthy data. That being said, on this occasion the shift occurred in an interval of time without precedent, and the fairies came to Scatter in a matter of three days. The cause of this is presently under investigation, but there is no prospective on the solution. The possibility that this is a deficiency in the employee's interaction skills cannot be denied, but as it might also be due to a still unknown cause, hasty conclusions ought be avoided.

As the standard of civilization increases remarkably during the Gathering period, it is necessary to pay attention that excessive influence from the Society of People does not occur. In particular, the evils peculiar to the Humanity of People, which have felonies as representative, are considered to be extremely harmful to fairy society, which possesses higher levels of technological systems. Excessive influence is not only against the ideals of the Mediator Committee, but would cause hardships in the execution of the job of Mediation itself.

Even an investigation from that sort of viewpoint revealed that it was untrue that there was inadequacy in the understanding of the employee in charge, there was no prediction of excessive influence on the fairies and the propagation of concepts such as religion, and there were truly absolutely totally no problems of any sort.

2. Second half

As a continuation from the previous half, in the second half a succession of Gathering and Scattering was sighted.

An artificial savanna was witnessed having been built by clearing the space in the ruins of a city of high-rises at a location four kilometers from Kusunoki Village, on the commerce route number seven that extends from it.

As a result of the employee's investigation, it was found that a large number of fairies was living there, practicing a pseudo-primitive life. Also, in this gathering both Cap³ and Mr. Chikuwa were spotted.

Seeing that their lifestyle was patterned after Mankind's Dawn, it was inferred that it was the conduct peculiar to fairies known as Imitating Men.

Furthermore, in the savanna was a large deployment of papercraft (see figure II) made into imitations of dinosaurs (humans and dinosaurs have never existed simultaneously, so this ought be seen as a type of fairy-style joke). The papercraft, self-powered via mere elastic motive power, had actually quite the complex construction, which reasserted how the fairies possess technology utterly out of the ordinary.

3 Originally Mr. Nakata, assuming miswrite.

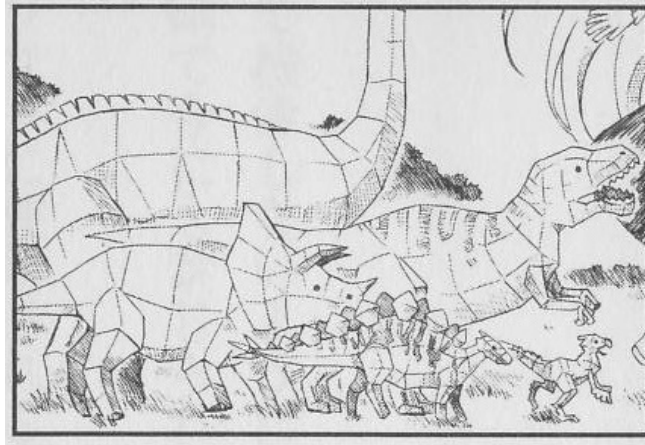


Figure II

They were witnessed personally by the employee, who had been proceeding in bestowing friendship material (sweets type). Now, this sort of contact did not lead to any accident whatsoever that could be dangerous to the fairies, and there were no problems of any sort. Afterwards, it was established that the papercraft by nature concealed the precious sweets within their bodies, and the concept of hunting came to be developed by the fairies. As the papercraft operated autonomously, in order to make their operations cease and acquiring the sweets there was no other mean except for physical destruction. The violent custom of hunting was certainly not instigated by the employee, and there was absolutely not even the smallest of problems.

Also, the activity of hunting later never went past the stage of play-pretend, and on this point there is nothing that appears to require concern. The shift to Scattered was witnessed, and with that, observation ended.

Now, as an apparently large number of papercrafts had been released on the savanna, a part of them have survived the pressure of the hunts and still exist.

It is expected some specimen will have passed past a part of the ruined buildings and spread beyond their territory, but the fact poses no danger, and considering that they are paper, it is believed that they will cease their operations before long.

However, in the eventuality that the papercrafts were equipped with functions to preserve their functionality, and because of that from here onwards it may happen that over long periods of time they do really bad things such as being witnessed, culled, naturally selected, variegated, and diversified, this one Mediator, standing as she does on a viewpoint of non-interference with internal affairs and who is not directly connected with the event, earnestly prays that it will all settle down with no problems of any sort.

Afterword

Hello, I'm Tanaka Romeo.

I believe many won't know about me.

For the sake of your sane tomorrow, please don't search this pen name on the Internet. In particular, it's forbidden by law for those born in the Heisei era to search for my pen name. Please be careful.

To make my introduction as simple as possible, I'm going to be the person whose occupation is *text data writer used in an application software for Windows*.

I'm one of those so-called trade goods.

And that's fine, isn't it? It's been nice to meet you.

About this novel

The editorial department personnel of Gagaga, whom I'd met by some chance, were truly close to each other.

The novels they sought had to be outstanding.

Predicting that with a Hiroshima accent⁴, I intentionally went all alone, trying to be a dark horse with a pretty style... I made a bit of a mistake, and what came to be made with a side-street spin was this novel.

This way of production is called spin-out (untrue).

The initial plan that was drawn had a touch of children's literature to it, in the format of short series that, when I imagined them finished, would come to be written like several volumes of stories all stamped out like cookies and identical, stuff that didn't come to need any sort of foreshadowing, detailed structure, enticing dramatis personae, or carefully executed mysteries, a truly relaxed novel, the kind you'd hear teachers go "*OK kids, now everybody write what they felt about it!*", one that could really sit in a row with the rest in an elementary school's library, that was the plan.

If this had been executed like that, I felt that I would come to be a Mr. Royalties well beyond the skills that come from my acting the dark horse. Like that world-famous writer of magical school stories.

Sad to say that today and at this hour the line that led to be a Non-Mr. Royalties came to be thicker, but turning this around, that meant I was free in every extent.

And so, well, I think this went well for how it was.

About the title

Basing myself on "why aren't bamboo peddlers extinct⁵?" method, it didn't have much to do with the contents but still I went and titled it something that could sell.

About charisma

I discovered that, on the website of Gagaga Bunko and other material, the catchword *charisma* was being used. I must be some really charismatic bastard.

That charisma must've been borrowed, as I do as casually as I breathe, from people and non-human machines, which was never clearer than when my acquaintance declared "*you, man, you really got charisma*", which made my face twist in as much disgust as I had in me. If I look back on my life, it certainly feels like I have a tendency to borrow too much. I have borrowed a

⁴ Not pictured in this translation.

⁵ A book of simplified economics that at least in part tries to answer this question.

great many things. I have borrowed and borrowed and borrowed all I could. And at times I have given back. When I couldn't give back at all, I borrowed and gave back elsewhere. All obeying the instructions of that ground-breaking pseudo-perpetual motion machine (bicycle powered). I have enough of that charismatic-ness to make even a parent's eyes well up with tears, but still, well, let's just leave the all too graphic talk about money at around here, shall we.

All of you born in Heisei, I'd like you to be careful that your life doesn't turn out like this.

About Shogakukan-sama

Even I am astonished by the fact that I'm working with *that* Shogakukan-sama as publisher. Shogakukan-sama means Corocoro, elementary schoolers from first to fourth year, education techniques for first years... it's a shining authority among bookmakers for its flawless book distribution.

As far as major company it's a major company, in fact it's a super-major company, and made me feel positivity like, *I'm gonna be involved in something long here, man!*

I'm sure that even elementary and middle schoolers will read this book... nah, will it even be read by any elementary and middle schoolers?

Just thinking that might be acting suspiciously.

Being a writer read even by elementary schoolers would make me think that I live in an Empire of Light.

If it were possible, even I would want to write the story of a boy that defeats great evil with marbles, spinning tops, or slot car racing. Here I am, today and at this hour, thinking back on the innocent feelings I harbored when I was young.

About what's next

Recently, book schedules have been moving dynamically, creating a lot of problems.

For this one I happened to have just the right amount of free time, but suddenly the Free Time Angel descended and whispered, "*since you're actually on holiday, instead of just sitting there slack-jawed, how about trying to write a novel or something?*" with that tsundere tone of hers, so I did my best and wrote. Once I did, all my time actually went into doing my job. I've been deceived here!

This book is tentatively going to have a continuation. To say it precisely, it will continue.

Forever. And so I can be proud to say that I haven't paid off all my foreshadowing maaan! (If I haven't written it then it's because of the deeply secret reason that I don't want to make things too hard.)

If there's the chance, we might even meet again.

At that time I hope to have done my best to go for that elementary school library, and I sincerely hope that you will have been so nice to have written positive remarks on the questionnaire card.

Of course, I will also accept harshly critical opinions via telepathy. Farewell.

[Editorial department - notice] First edition May 2007. Partial revision November 2011.

This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.